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THE WORKS OF

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

SWANSTON EDITION

VOLUME VII

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THE WORKS OF
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

VOLUME SEVEN

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PRINCE OTTO

TO

NELLY VAN DE GRIFT

(MRS. ADULFO SANCHEZ, OF MONTEREY)

AT last, after so many years, I have the pleasure of re-introducing you to "Prince Otto," whom you will remember a very little fellow, no bigger, in fact, than a few sheets of memoranda written for me by your kind hand. The sight of his name will carry you back to an old wooden house embowered in creepers; a house that was far gone in the respectable stages of antiquity, and seemed indissoluble from the green garden in which it stood, and that yet was a sea-traveller in its younger days, and had come round the Horn piecemeal in the belly of a ship, and might have heard the seamen stamping and shouting and the note of the boatswain's whistle. It will recall to you the nondescript inhabitants, now so widely scattered:—the two horses, the dog, and the four cats, some of them still looking in your face as you read these lines;—the poor lady, so unfortunately married to an author;—the China boy, by this time, perhaps, baiting his line by the banks of a river in the Flowery Land;—and in particular the Scot who was then sick apparently unto death, and whom you did so much to cheer and keep in good behaviour.

You may remember that he was full of ambitions and designs: so soon as he had his health again completely, you may remember the fortune he was to earn, the journeys he was to go upon, the delights he was to enjoy and confer, and (among other matters) the masterpiece he was to make of "Prince Otto"!

Well, we will not give in that we are finally beaten. We

read together in those days the story of Braddock, and how, as he was carried dying from the scene of his defeat, he promised himself to do better another time: a story that will always touch a brave heart, and a dying speech worthy of a more fortunate commander. I try to be of Braddock's mind. I still mean to get my health again; I still purpose, by hook or crook, this book or the next, to launch a masterpiece; and I still intend—somehow, some time or other—to see your face and to hold your hand.

Meanwhile, this little paper traveller goes forth instead, crosses the great seas and the long plains and the dark mountains, and comes at last to your door in Monterey, charged with tender greetings. Pray you, take him in. He comes from a house where (even as in your own) there are gathered together some of the waifs of our company at Oakland; a house—for all its outlandish Gaelic name and distant station —where you are well-beloved.

R. L. S.

Skerryvore, Bournemouth.

BOOK I

PRINCE ERRANT

PRINCE OTTO

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH THE PRINCE DEPARTS ON AN ADVENTURE

You shall seek in vain upon the map of Europe for the bygone state of Grünewald. An independent principality, an infinitesimal member of the German Empire, she played, for several centuries, her part in the discord of Europe; and, at last, in the ripeness of time and at the spiriting of several bald diplomatists, vanished like a morning ghost. Less fortunate than Poland, she left not a regret behind her; and the very memory of her boundaries has faded.

It was a patch of hilly country covered with thick wood. Many streams took their beginning in the glens of Grünewald, turning mills for the inhabitants. There was one town, Mittwalden, and many brown, wooden hamlets, climbing roof above roof, along the steep bottom of dells, and communicating by covered bridges over the larger of the torrents. The hum of watermills, the splash of running water, the clean odour of pine sawdust, the sound and smell of the pleasant wind among the innumerable army of the mountain pines, the dropping fire of huntsmen, the dull stroke of the wood-axe, intolerable roads, fresh trout for supper in the clean bare chamber of an inn, and the song of birds and the music of the village-bells—these were the recollections of the Grünewald tourist.

North and east the foothills of Grünewald sank with

varying profile into a vast plain. On these sides many small states bordered with the principality, Gerolstein, an extinct grand duchy, among the number. On the south it marched with the comparatively powerful kingdom of Seaboard Bohemia, celebrated for its flowers and mountain bears, and inhabited by a people of singular simplicity and tenderness of heart. Several intermarriages had, in the course of centuries, united the crowned families of Grünewald and Maritime Bohemia; and the last Prince of Grünewald, whose history I purpose to relate, drew his descent through Perdita, the only daughter of King Florizel the First of Bohemia. That these intermarriages had in some degree mitigated the rough, manly stock of the first Grünewalds, was an opinion widely held within the borders of the principality. The charcoal burner, the mountain sawyer, the wielder of the broad axe among the congregated pines of Grünewald, proud of their hard hands, proud of their shrewd ignorance and almost savage lore, looked with an unfeigned contempt on the soft character and manners of the sovereign race.

The precise year of grace in which this tale begins shall be left to the conjecture of the reader. But for the season of the year (which, in such a story, is the more important of the two) it was already so far forward in the spring, that when mountain people heard horns echoing all day about the north-west corner of the principality, they told themselves that Prince Otto and his hunt were up and out for the last time till the return of autumn.

At this point the borders of Grünewald descend somewhat steeply, here and there breaking into crags; and this shaggy and trackless country stands in a bold contrast to the cultivated plain below. It was traversed at that period by two roads alone; one, the imperial highway, bound to Brandenau in Gerolstein, descended the slope obliquely and by the easiest gradients. The other

ran like a fillet across the very forehead of the hills, dipping into savage gorges, and wetted by the spray of tiny waterfalls. Once it passed beside a certain tower or castle, built sheer upon the margin of a formidable cliff, and commanding a vast prospect of the skirts of Grünewald and the busy plains of Gerolstein. The Felsenburg (so this tower was called) served now as a prison, now as a hunting-seat; and for all it stood so lonesome to the naked eye, with the aid of a good glass the burghers of Brandenau could count its windows from the lime-tree terrace where they walked at night.

In the wedge of forest hillside enclosed between the roads, the horns continued all day long to scatter tumult; and at length, as the sun began to draw near to the horizon of the plain, a rousing triumph announced the slaughter of the quarry. The first and second huntsman had drawn somewhat aside, and from the summit of a knoll gazed down before them on the drooping shoulders of the hill and across the expanse of plain. They covered their eyes, for the sun was in their faces. The glory of its going down was somewhat pale. Through the confused tracery of many thousands of naked poplars, the smoke of so many houses, and the evening steam ascending from the fields, the sails of a windmill on a gentle eminence moved very conspicuously, like a donkey's ears. And hard by, like an open gash, the imperial high-road ran straight sunward, an artery of travel.

There is one of nature's spiritual ditties, that has not yet been set to words or human music: "The Invitation to the Road"; an air continually sounding in the ears of gipsies, and to whose inspiration our nomadic fathers journeyed all their days. The hour, the season, and the scene, all were in delicate accordance. The air was full of birds of passage, steering westward and northward over Grünewald, an army of specks to the up-looking eye. And below, the great practicable road was bound for the same quarter.

But to the two horsemen on the knoll this spiritual ditty was unheard. They were, indeed, in some concern of mind, scanning every fold of the subjacent forest, and betraying both anger and dismay in their impatient gestures.

"I do not see him, Kuno," said the first huntsman, "nowhere—not a trace, not a hair of the mare's tail! No, sir, he's off; broke cover and got away. Why, for twopence I would hunt him with the dogs!"

"Mayhap, he's gone home," said Kuno, but without conviction.

"Home!" sneered the other. "I give him twelve days to get home. No, it's begun again; it's as it was three years ago, before he married; a disgrace! Hereditary prince, hereditary fool! There goes the government over the borders on a grey mare. What's that? No, nothing—no, I tell you, on my word, I set more store by a good gelding or an English dog. That for your Otto!"

"He's not my Otto," growled Kuno.

"Then I don't know whose he is," was the retort.

"You would put your hand in the fire for him to-morrow," said Kuno, facing round.

"Me!" cried the huntsman. "I would see him hanged! I'm a Grünewald patriot—enrolled, and have my medal, too; and I would help a prince! I'm for liberty and Gondremark."

"Well, it's all one," said Kuno. "If anybody said what you said, you would have his blood, and you know it."

"You have him on the brain," retorted his companion. — "There he goes!" he cried, the next moment.

And sure enough, about a mile down the mountain, a rider on a white horse was seen to flit rapidly across a heathy open and vanish among the trees on the farther side.

"In ten minutes he'll be over the border into Gerolstein," said Kuno. "It's past cure."

"Well, if he founders that mare, I'll never forgive him," added the other, gathering his reins.

And as they turned down from the knoll to rejoin their comrades, the sun dipped and disappeared, and the woods fell instantly into the gravity and greyness of the early night.

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH THE PRINCE PLAYS HAROUN-AL-RASCHID

The night fell upon the Prince while he was threading green tracks in the lower valleys of the wood ; and though the stars came out overhead and displayed the interminable order of the pine-tree pyramids, regular and dark like cypresses, their light was of small service to a traveller in such lonely paths, and from thenceforth he rode at random. The austere face of nature, the uncertain issue of his course, the open sky and the free air, delighted him like wine ; and the hoarse chafing of a river on his left sounded in his ears agreeably.

It was past eight at night before his toil was rewarded and he issued at last out of the forest on the firm white high-road. It lay downhill before him with a sweeping eastward trend, faintly bright between the thickets ; and Otto paused and gazed upon it. So it ran, league after league, still joining others, to the farthest ends of Europe, there skirting the sea-surge, here gleaming in the lights of cities ; and the innumerable army of tramps and travellers moved upon it in all lands as by a common impulse, and were now in all places drawing near to the inn door and the night's rest. The pictures swarmed and vanished in his brain ; a surge of temptation, a beat of all his blood, went over him, to set spur to the mare and to go on into the unknown for ever. And then it passed away ; hunger and fatigue, and that habit of middling actions which we call common sense, resumed their empire ; and in that changed mood his eye lighted upon two bright windows on his left hand, between the road and river.

He turned off by a by-road, and in a few minutes he was knocking with his whip on the door of a large farm-house, and a chorus of dogs from the farmyard were making angry answer. A very tall, old, white-headed man came, shading a candle, at the summons. He had been of great strength in his time, and of a handsome countenance ; but now he was fallen away, his teeth were quite gone, and his voice when he spoke was broken and falsetto.

" You will pardon me," said Otto. " I am a traveller and have entirely lost my way."

" Sir," said the old man, in a very stately, shaky manner, " you are at the River Farm, and I am Killian Gottesheim, at your disposal. We are here, sir, at about an equal distance from Mittwalden in Grünewald and Brandenau in Gerolstein : six leagues to either, and the road excellent ; but there is not a wine-bush, not a carter's alehouse, anywhere between. You will have to accept my hospitality for the night ; rough hospitality, to which I make you freely welcome ; for, sir," he added, with a bow, " it is God who sends the guest."

" Amen. And I most heartily thank you," replied Otto, bowing in his turn.

" Fritz," said the old man, turning towards the interior, " lead round this gentleman's horse ; and you, sir, condescend to enter."

Otto entered a chamber occupying the greater part of the ground-floor of the building. It had probably once been divided ; for the farther end was raised by a long step above the nearer, and the blazing fire and the white supper-table seemed to stand upon a daïs. All around were dark, brass-mounted cabinets and cupboards ; dark shelves carrying ancient country crockery ; guns and antlers and broadside ballads on the wall ; a tall old clock with roses on the dial ; and down in one corner the comfortable promise of a wine-barrel. It was homely, elegant, and quaint.

A powerful youth hurried out to attend on the grey mare; and when Mr. Killian Gottesheim had presented him to his daughter Ottilia, Otto followed to the stable as became, not perhaps the Prince, but the good horseman. When he returned, a smoking omelette and some slices of home-cured ham were waiting him; these were followed by a ragout and a cheese; and it was not until his guest had entirely satisfied his hunger, and the whole party drew about the fire over the wine-jug, that Killian Gottesheim's elaborate courtesy permitted him to address a question to the Prince.

"You have perhaps ridden far, sir?" he inquired.

"I have, as you say, ridden far," replied Otto; "and, as you have seen, I was prepared to do justice to your daughter's cookery."

"Possibly, sir, from the direction of Brandenau?" continued Killian.

"Precisely: and I should have slept to-night, had I not wandered, in Mittwalden," answered the Prince, weaving in a patch of truth, according to the habit of all liars.

"Business leads you to Mittwalden?" was the next question.

"Mere curiosity," said Otto. "I have never yet visited the principality of Grünewald."

"A pleasant state, sir," piped the old man, nodding, "a very pleasant state, and a fine race, both pines and people. We reckon ourselves part Grünewalders here, lying so near the borders; and the river there is all good Grünewald water, every drop of it. Yes, sir, a fine state. A man of Grünewald now will swing me an axe over his head that many a man of Gerolstein could hardly lift; and the pines, why, deary me, there must be more pines in that little state, sir, than people in this whole big world. 'Tis twenty years now since I crossed the marshes, for we grow home-keepers in old age; but I mind it as if it was yesterday. Up and down, the road keeps right

on from here to Mittwalden ; and nothing all the way but the good green pine-trees, big and little, and water-power ! water-power at every step, sir. We once sold a bit of forest, up there beside the high-road ; and the sight of minted money that we got for it has set me ciphering ever since what all the pines in Grünewald would amount to."

" I suppose you see nothing of the Prince ? " inquired Otto.

" No," said the young man, speaking for the first time, " nor want to."

" Why so ? is he so much disliked ? " asked Otto.

" Not what you might call disliked," replied the old gentleman, " but despised, sir."

" Indeed," said the Prince, somewhat faintly.

" Yes, sir, despised," nodded Killian, filling a long pipe, " and, to my way of thinking, justly despised. Here is a man with great opportunities, and what does he do with them ? He hunts, and he dresses very prettily—which is a thing to be ashamed of in a man—and he acts plays ; and if he does aught else, the news of it has not come here."

" Yet these are all innocent," said Otto. " What would you have him do—make war ? "

" No, sir," replied the old man. " But here it is : I have been fifty years upon this River Farm, and wrought in it, day in, day out ; I have ploughed and sowed and reaped, and risen early, and waked late ; and this is the upshot : that all these years it has supported me and my family ; and been the best friend that ever I had, set aside my wife ; and now, when my time comes, I leave it a better farm than when I found it. So it is, if a man works hearty in the order of nature, he gets bread and he receives comfort, and whatever he touches breeds. And it humbly appears to me, if that Prince was to labour on his throne, as I have laboured and wrought in my farm, he would find both an increase and a blessing."

"I believe with you, sir," Otto said; "and yet the parallel is inexact. For the farmer's life is natural and simple; but the prince's is both artificial and complicated. It is easy to do right in the one, and exceedingly difficult not to do wrong in the other. If your crop is blighted, you can take off your bonnet and say, 'God's will be done'; but if the prince meets with a reverse, he may have to blame himself for the attempt. And, perhaps, if all the kings in Europe were to confine themselves to innocent amusement, the subjects would be the better off."

"Ay," said the young man Fritz, "you are in the right of it there. That was a true word spoken. And I see you are like me, a good patriot and an enemy to princes."

Otto was somewhat abashed at this deduction, and he made haste to change his ground. "But," said he, "you surprise me by what you say of this Prince Otto. I have heard him, I must own, more favourably painted. I was told he was, in his heart, a good fellow, and the enemy of no one but himself."

"And so he is, sir," said the girl, "a very handsome, pleasant prince; and we know some who would shed their blood for him."

"O! Kuno!" said Fritz. "An ignoramus!"

"Ay, Kuno, to be sure," quavered the old farmer. "Well, since this gentleman is a stranger to these parts, and curious about the Prince, I do believe that story might divert him. This Kuno, you must know, sir, is one of the hunt servants, and a most ignorant, intemperate man: a right Grünewalder, as we say in Gerolstein. We know him well, in this house; for he has come as far as here after his stray dogs; and I make all welcome, sir, without account of state or nation. And, indeed, between Gerolstein and Grünewald the peace has held so long that the roads stand open like my door; and a man will make no more of the frontier than the very birds themselves."

"Ay," said Otto, "it has been a long peace—a peace of centuries."

"Centuries, as you say," returned Killian: "the more the pity that it should not be for ever. Well, sir, this Kuno was one day in fault, and Otto, who has a quick temper, up with his whip and thrashed him, they do say, soundly. Kuno took it as best he could, but at last he broke out, and dared the Prince to throw his whip away and wrestle like a man; for we are all great at wrestling in these parts, and it's so that we generally settle our disputes. Well, sir, the Prince did so; and, being a weakly creature, found the tables turned; for the man whom he had just been thrashing like a negro slave, lifted him with a back grip and threw him heels overhead."

"He broke his bridle-arm," cried Fritz—"and some say his nose. Serve him right, say I! Man to man, which is the better at that?"

"And then?" asked Otto.

"O, then Kuno carried him home; and they were the best of friends from that day forth. I don't say it's a discreditable story, you observe," continued Mr. Gottesheim; "but it's droll, and that's the fact. A man should think before he strikes; for, as my nephew says, man to man was the old valuation."

"Now, if you were to ask me," said Otto, "I should perhaps surprise you. I think it was the Prince that conquered."

"And, sir, you would be right," replied Killian seriously. "In the eyes of God, I do not question but you would be right; but men, sir, look at these things differently, and they laugh."

"They made a song of it," observed Fritz. "How does it go? Ta-tum-ta-ra . . ."

"Well," interrupted Otto, who had no great anxiety to hear the song, "the Prince is young; he may yet mend."

"Not so young, by your leave," cried Fritz. "A man of forty."

"Thirty-six," corrected Mr. Gottesheim.

"O," cried Ottilia, in obvious disillusion, "a man of middle age! And they said he was so handsome when he was young!"

"And bald, too," added Fritz.

Otto passed his hand among his locks. At that moment he was far from happy, and even the tedious evenings at Mittwalden Palace began to smile upon him by comparison.

"O, six-and-thirty!" he protested. "A man is not yet old at six-and-thirty. I am that age myself."

"I should have taken you for more, sir," piped the old farmer. "But if that be so, you are of an age with Master Ottekin, as people call him; and, I would wager a crown, have done more service in your time. Though it seems young by comparison with men of a great age like me, yet it's some way through life for all that; and the mere fools and fiddlers are beginning to grow weary and to look old. Yes, sir, by six-and-thirty, if a man be a follower of God's laws, he should have made himself a home and a good name to live by; he should have got a wife and a blessing on his marriage; and his works, as the Word says, should begin to follow him."

"Ah, well, the Prince is married," cried Fritz, with a coarse burst of laughter.

"That seems to entertain you, sir," said Otto.

"Ay," said the young boor. "Did you not know that? I thought all Europe knew it!" And he added a pantomime of a nature to explain his accusation to the dullest.

"Ah sir," said Mr. Gottesheim, "it is very plain that you are not from hereabouts! But the truth is, that the whole princely family and Court are rips and rascals, not one to mend another. They live, sir, in idleness and —what most commonly follows it—corruption. The

Princess has a lover; a Baron, as he calls himself, from East Prussia; and the Prince is so little of a man, sir, that he holds the candle. Nor is that the worst of it, for this foreigner and his paramour are suffered to transact the state affairs, while the Prince takes the salary and leaves all things to go to wrack. There will follow upon this some manifest judgment which, though I am old, I may survive to see."

"Good man, you are in the wrong about Gondremark," said Fritz, showing a greatly increased animation; "but for all the rest, you speak the God's truth like a good patriot. As for the Prince, if he would take and strangle his wife, I would forgive him yet."

"Nay, Fritz," said the old man, "that would be to add iniquity to evil. For you perceive, sir," he continued, once more addressing himself to the unfortunate Prince, "this Otto has himself to thank for these disorders. He has his young wife, and his principality, and he has sworn to cherish both."

"Sworn at the altar!" echoed Fritz. "But put your faith in princes!"

"Well, sir, he leaves them both to an adventurer from East Prussia," pursued the farmer: "leaves the girl to be seduced and to go on from bad to worse, till her name's become a tap-room by-word, and she not yet twenty; leaves the country to be overtaxed, and bullied with armaments, and jockied into war——"

"War!" cried Otto.

"So they say, sir; those that watch their ongoings, say to war," asseverated Killian. "Well, sir, that is very sad; it is a sad thing for this poor, wicked girl to go down to hell with people's curses; it's a sad thing for a tight little happy country to be misconducted; but whoever may complain, I humbly conceive, sir, that this Otto cannot. What he has worked for, that he has got; and may God have pity on his soul, for a great and a silly sinner's!"

"He has broke his oath; then he is a perjurer. He takes the money and leaves the work; why, then plainly he's a thief. A cuckold he was before, and a fool by birth. Better me that!" cried Fritz, and snapped his fingers.

"And now, sir, you will see a little," continued the farmer, "why we think so poorly of this Prince Otto. There's such a thing as a man being pious and honest in the private way; and there is such a thing, sir, as a public virtue; but when a man has neither, the Lord lighten him! Even this Gondremark, that Fritz here thinks so much of——"

"Ay," interrupted Fritz, "Gondremark's the man for me. I would we had his like in Gerolstein."

"He is a bad man," said the old farmer, shaking his head; "and there was never good begun by the breach of God's commandments. But so far I will go with you: he is a man that works for what he has."

"I tell you he's the hope of Grünewald," cried Fritz. "He doesn't suit some of your high-and-dry, old, ancient ideas; but he's a downright modern man—a man of the new lights and the progress of the age. He does some things wrong; so they all do; but he has the people's interests next his heart; and you mark me—you, sir, who are a Liberal, and the enemy of all their governments, you please to mark my words—the day will come in Grünewald, when they take out that yellow-headed skulk of a Prince and that dough-faced Messalina of a Princess, march 'em back foremost over the borders, and proclaim the Baron Gondremark first President. I've heard them say it in a speech. I was at a meeting once at Brandenau, and the Mittwalden delegates spoke up for fifteen thousand. Fifteen thousand, all brigaded, and each man with a medal round his neck to rally by. That's all Gondremark."

"Ay, sir, you see what it leads to: wild talk to-day, and wilder doings to-morrow," said the old man. "For

there is one thing certain: that this Gondremark has one foot in the Court backstairs, and the other in the Masons' lodges. He gives himself out, sir, for what nowadays they call a patriot: a man from East Prussia!"

"Give himself out!" cried Fritz. "He is! He is to lay by his title as soon as the Republic is declared; I heard it in a speech."

"Lay by Baron to take up President?" returned Killian. "King Log, King Stork. But you'll live longer than I, and you will see the fruits of it."

"Father," whispered Ottilia, pulling at the speaker's coat, "surely the gentleman is ill."

"I beg your pardon," cried the farmer, re-waking to hospitable thoughts; "can I offer you anything?"

"I thank you. I am very weary," answered Otto. "I have presumed upon my strength. If you would show me to a bed, I should be grateful."

"Ottilia, a candle!" said the old man. "Indeed sir, you look paley. A little cordial water? No? Then follow me, I beseech you, and I will bring you to the stranger's bed. You are not the first by many who has slept well below my roof," continued the old gentleman, mounting the stairs before his guest; "for good food, honest wine, a grateful conscience, and a little pleasant chat before a man retires, are worth all the possets and apothecary's drugs. See, sir," and here he opened a door and ushered Otto into a little whitewashed sleeping-room, "here you are in port. It is small, but it is airy, and the sheets are clean and kept in lavender. The window, too, looks out above the river, and there's no music like a little river's. It plays the same tune (and that's the favourite) over and over again, and yet does not weary of it like men fiddlers. It takes the mind out of doors; and though we should be grateful for good houses, there is, after all, no house like God's out-of-doors. And lastly, sir, it quiets a man down like saying his prayers. So

here, sir, I take my kind leave of you until to-morrow; and it is my prayerful wish that you may slumber like a prince."

And the old man, with the twentieth courteous inclination, left his guest alone.

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH THE PRINCE COMFORTS AGE AND BEAUTY AND DELIVERS A LECTURE ON DISCRETION IN LOVE

THE Prince was early abroad: in the time of the first chorus of birds, of the pure and quiet air, of the slanting sunlight and the mile-long shadows. To one who had passed a miserable night, the freshness of that hour was tonic and reviving; to steal a march upon his slumbering fellows, to be the Adam of the coming day, composed and fortified his spirits; and the Prince, breathing deep and pausing as he went, walked in the wet fields beside his shadow, and was glad.

A trellised path led down into the valley of the brook, and he turned to follow it. The stream was a break-neck, boiling highland river. Hard by the farm, it leaped a little precipice in a thick grey-mare's tail of twisted filaments, and then lay and worked and bubbled in a lynn. Into the middle of this quaking pool a rock protruded, shelving to a cape; and thither Otto scrambled and sat down to ponder.

Soon the sun struck through the screen of branches and thin early leaves that made a hanging bower above the fall; and the golden lights and flitting shadows fell upon and marbled the surface of that seething pot; and rays plunged deep among the turning waters; and a spark, as bright as a diamond, lit upon the swaying eddy. It began to grow warm where Otto lingered, warm and heady; the lights swam, weaving their maze across the shaken pool; on the impending rock, reflections danced

like butterflies; and the air was fanned by the waterfall as by a swinging curtain.

Otto, who was weary with tossing and beset with horrid phantoms of remorse and jealousy, instantly fell dead in love with that sun-chequered, echoing corner. Holding his feet, he stared out of a drowsy trance, wondering, admiring, musing, losing his way among uncertain thoughts. There is nothing that so apes the external bearing of free will as that unconscious bustle, obscurely following liquid laws, with which a river contends among obstructions. It seems the very play of man and destiny, and as Otto pored on these recurrent changes, he grew, by equal steps, the sleepier and the more profound. Eddy and Prince were alike jostled in their purpose, alike anchored by intangible influences in one corner of the world. Eddy and Prince were alike useless, starkly useless, in the cosmology of men. Eddy and Prince—Prince and Eddy.

It is probable he had been some while asleep when a voice recalled him from oblivion. "Sir," it was saying; and looking round, he saw Mr. Killian's daughter, terrified by her boldness, and making bashful signals from the shore. She was a plain, honest lass, healthy and happy and good, and with that sort of beauty that comes of happiness and health. But her confusion lent her for the moment an additional charm.

"Good-morning," said Otto, rising and moving towards her. "I arose early and was in a dream."

"O, sir!" she cried, "I wish to beg of you to spare my father; for I assure your Highness, if he had known who you was, he would have bitten his tongue out sooner. And Fritz, too—how he went on! But I had a notion; and this morning I went straight down into the stable, and there was your Highness's crown upon the stirrup-irons! But, O, sir, I made certain you would spare them; for they were as innocent as lambs."

"My dear," said Otto, both amused and gratified, "you do not understand. It is I who am in the wrong;

for I had no business to conceal my name and lead on these gentlemen to speak of me. And it is I who have to beg of you that you will keep my secret and not betray the discourtesy of which I was guilty. As for any fear of me, your friends are safe in Gerolstein; and even in my own territory, you must be well aware I have no power."

"O, sir," she said, curtseying, "I would not say that: the huntsmen would all die for you."

"Happy Prince!" said Otto. "But although you are too courteous to avow the knowledge, you have had many opportunities of learning that I am a vain show. Only last night we heard it very clearly stated. You see the shadow flitting on this hard rock? Prince Otto, I am afraid, is but the moving shadow, and the name of the rock is Gondremark. Ah! if your friends had fallen foul of Gondremark! But happily the younger of the two admires him. But as for the old gentleman your father, he is a wise man and an excellent talker, and I would take a long wager he is honest."

"O, for honest, your Highness, that he is!" exclaimed the girl. "And Fritz is as honest as he. And as for all they said, it was just talk and nonsense. When countryfolk get gossiping, they go on, I do assure you, for the fun; they don't as much as think of what they say. If you went to the next farm, it's my belief you would hear as much against my father."

"Nay, nay," said Otto, "there you go too fast. For all that was said against Prince Otto——"

"O, it was shameful!" cried the girl.

"Not shameful—true," returned Otto. "O, yes—true. I am all they said of me—all that and worse."

"I never!" cried Ottilia. "Is that how you do? Well, you would never be a soldier. Now, if anyone accuses me, I get up and give it them. O, I defend myself. I wouldn't take a fault at another person's hands, no, not if I had it on my forehead. And that's what you

must do, if you mean to live it out. But, indeed, I never heard such nonsense. I should think you was ashamed of yourself! You're bald, then, I suppose?"

"O, no," said Otto, fairly laughing. "There I acquit myself: not bald!"

"Well, and good?" pursued the girl. "Come now, you know you are good, and I'll make you say so. . . . Your Highness, I beg your humble pardon. But there's no disrespect intended. And anyhow, you know you are."

"Why, now, what am I to say?" replied Otto. "You are a cook, and excellently well you do it; I embrace the chance of thanking you for the ragout. Well now, have you not seen good food so bedevilled by unskilful cookery that no one could be brought to eat the pudding? That is me, my dear. I am full of good ingredients, but the dish is worthless. I am—I give it you in one word—sugar in the salad."

"Well, I don't care, you're good," reiterated Ottilia, a little flushed by having failed to understand.

"I will tell you one thing," replied Otto: "You are!"

"Ah, well, that's what they all said of you," moralised the girl; "such a tongue to come round—such a flattering tongue!"

"O, you forget, I am a man of middle age," the Prince chuckled.

"Well, to speak to you, I should think you was a boy; and Prince or no Prince, if you came worrying where I was cooking, I would pin a napkin to your tails. . . . And, O Lord, I declare I hope your Highness will forgive me," the girl added. "I can't keep it in my mind."

"No more can I," cried Otto. "That is just what they complain of!"

They made a loverly-looking couple; only the heavy pouring of that horse-tail of water made them raise their voices above lovers' pitch. But to a jealous onlooker

from above, their mirth and close proximity might easily give umbrage; and a rough voice out of a tuft of brambles began calling on Ottilia by name. She changed colour at that. "It is Fritz," she said. "I must go."

"Go, my dear, and I need not bid you go in peace, for I think you have discovered that I am not formidable at close quarters," said the Prince, and made her a fine gesture of dismissal.

So Ottilia skipped up the bank, and disappeared into the thicket, stopping once for a single blushing bob—blushing, because she had in the interval once more forgotten and remembered the stranger's quality.

Otto returned to his rock promontory; but his humour had in the meantime changed. The sun now shone more fairly on the pool; and over its brown, welling surface, the blue of heaven and the golden green of the spring foliage danced in fleeting arabesque. The eddies laughed and brightened with essential colour. And the beauty of the dell began to rankle in the Prince's mind; it was so near to his own borders, yet without. He had never had much of the joy of possessorship in any of the thousand and one beautiful and curious things that were his; and now he was conscious of envy for what was another's. It was, indeed, a smiling, dilettante sort of envy; but yet there it was: the passion of Ahab for the vineyard, done in little; and he was relieved when Mr. Killian appeared upon the scene.

"I hope, sir, that you have slept well under my plain roof," said the old farmer.

"I am admiring this sweet spot that you are privileged to dwell in," replied Otto, evading the inquiry.

"It is rustic," returned Mr. Gottesheim, looking around him with complacency, "a very rustic corner; and some of the land to the west is most excellent fat land, excellent deep soil. You should see my wheat in the ten-acre field. There is not a farm in Grünewald, no, nor many in Gerolstein, to match the River Farm.

Some sixty—I keep thinking when I sow—some sixty, and some seventy, and some an hundredfold; and my own place, six score! But that, sir, is partly the farming."

"And the stream has fish?" asked Otto.

"A fish-pond," said the farmer. "Ay, it is a pleasant bit. It is pleasant even here, if one had time, with the brook drumming in that black pool, and the green things hanging all about the rocks, and, dear heart, to see the very pebbles! all turned to gold and precious stones! But you have come to that time of life, sir, when, if you will excuse me, you must look to have the rheumatism set in. Thirty to forty is, as one may say, their seed-time. And this is a damp, cold corner for the early morning and an empty stomach. If I might humbly advise you, sir, I would be moving."

"With all my heart," said Otto gravely. "And so you have lived your life here?" he added, as they turned to go.

"Here I was born," replied the farmer, "and here I wish I could say I was to die. But fortune, sir, fortune turns the wheel. They say she is blind, but we will hope she only sees a little farther on. My grandfather and my father and I, we have all tilled these acres, my furrow following theirs. All the three names are on the garden bench, two Killians and one Johann. Yes, sir, good men have prepared themselves for the great change in my old garden. Well do I mind my father, in a woollen night-cap, the good soul, going round and round to see the last of it. 'Killian,' said he, 'do you see the smoke of my tobacco? Why,' said he, 'that is man's life.' It was his last pipe, and I believe he knew it; and it was a strange thing, without doubt, to leave the trees that he had planted, and the son that he had begotten, ay, sir, and even the old pipe with the Turk's head that he had smoked since he was a lad and went a-courting. But here we have no continuing city; and as for the eternal, it's a comfortable thought that we have other merits than our own. And

yet you would hardly think how sore it goes against the grain with me, to die in a strange bed."

"And must you do so? For what reason?" Otto asked.

"The reason? The place is to be sold: three thousand crowns," replied Mr. Gottesheim. "Had it been a third of that, I may say without boasting that, what with my credit and my savings, I could have met the sum. But at three thousand, unless I have singular good fortune and the new proprietor continues me in office, there is nothing left me but to budge."

Otto's fancy for the place redoubled at the news, and became joined with other feelings. If all he heard were true, Grünewald was growing very hot for a sovereign Prince; it might be well to have a refuge; and if so, what more delightful hermitage could man imagine? Mr. Gottesheim, besides, had touched his sympathies. Every man loves in his soul to play the part of the stage deity. And to step down to the aid of the old farmer, who had so roughly handled him in talk, was the ideal of a Fair Revenge. Otto's thoughts brightened at the prospect, and he began to regard himself with a renewed respect.

"I can find you, I believe, a purchaser," he said, "and one who would continue to avail himself of your skill."

"Can you, sir, indeed?" said the old man. "Well, I shall be heartily obliged; for I begin to find a man may practise resignation all his days, as he takes physic, and not come to like it in the end."

"If you will have the papers drawn, you may even burthen the purchase with your interest," said Otto. "Let it be assured to you through life."

"Your friend, sir," insinuated Killian, "would not, perhaps, care to make the interest reversible? Fritz is a good lad."

"Fritz is young," said the Prince drily; "he must earn consideration, not inherit."

"He has long worked upon the place, sir," insisted

Mr. Gottesheim; "and at my great age, for I am seventy-eight come harvest, it would be a troublesome thought to the proprietor how to fill my shoes. It would be a care spared to assure yourself of Fritz. And I believe he might be tempted by a permanency."

"The young man has unsettled views," returned Otto.

"Possibly the purchaser——" began Killian.

A little spot of anger burned in Otto's cheek. "I am the purchaser," he said.

"It was what I might have guessed," replied the farmer, bowing with an aged, obsequious dignity. "You have made an old man very happy; and I may say, indeed, that I have entertained an angel unawares. Sir, the great people of this world—and by that I mean those who are great in station—if they had only hearts like yours, how they would make the fires burn and the poor sing!"

"I would not judge them hardly, sir," said Otto. "We all have our frailties."

"Truly, sir," said Mr. Gottesheim, with unction. "And by what name, sir, am I to address my generous landlord?"

The double recollection of an English traveller, whom he had received the week before at court, and of an old English rogue called Transome, whom he had known in youth, came pertinently to the Prince's help. "Transome," he answered, "is my name. I am an English traveller. It is, to-day, Tuesday. On Thursday, before noon, the money shall be ready. Let us meet, if you please, in Mittwalden, at the 'Morning Star.'"

"I am, in all things lawful, your servant to command," replied the farmer. "An Englishman! You are a great race of travellers. And has your lordship some experience of land?"

"I have had some interest of the kind before," returned the Prince; "not in Gerolstein, indeed. But

fortune, as you say, turns the wheel, and I desire to be beforehand with her revolutions."

"Very right, sir, I am sure," said Mr. Killian.

They had been strolling with deliberation; but they were now drawing near to the farmhouse, mounting by the trellised pathway to the level of the meadow. A little before them the sound of voices had been some while audible, and now grew louder and more distinct with every step of their advance. Presently, when they emerged upon the top of the bank, they beheld Fritz and Ottilia some way off; he, very black and bloodshot, emphasising his hoarse speech with the smacking of his fist against his palm; she, standing a little way off in blowsy, voluble distress.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Gottesheim, and made as if he would turn aside.

But Otto went straight towards the lovers, in whose dissension he believed himself to have a share. And, indeed, as soon as he had seen the Prince, Fritz had stood tragic, as if awaiting and defying his approach.

"O, here you are!" he cried, as soon as they were near enough for easy speech. "You are a man at least, and must reply. What were you after? Why were you two skulking in the bush? God!" he broke out, turning again upon Ottilia, "to think that I should waste my heart on you!"

"I beg your pardon," Otto cut in. "You were addressing me. In virtue of what circumstance am I to render you an account of this young lady's conduct? Are you her father? her brother? her husband?"

"O, sir, you know as well as I," returned the peasant. "We keep company, she and I. I love her, and she is by way of loving me; but all shall be above-board, I would have her to know. I have a good pride of my own."

"Why, I perceive I must explain to you what love is," said Otto. "Its measure is kindness. It is very possible that you are proud; but she, too, may have some

self-esteem; I do not speak for myself. And perhaps, if your own doings were so curiously examined, you might find it inconvenient to reply."

"These are all set-offs," said the young man. "You know very well that a man is a man, and a woman only a woman. That holds good all over, up and down. I ask you a question, I ask it again, and here I stand." He drew a mark and toed it.

"When you have studied liberal doctrines somewhat deeper," said the Prince, "you will perhaps change your note. You are a man of false weights and measures, my young friend. You have one scale for women, another for men; one for princes, and one for farmer-folk. On the prince who neglects his wife you can be most severe. But what of the lover who insults his mistress? You use the name of love. I should think this lady might very fairly ask to be delivered from love of such a nature. For if I, a stranger, had been one-tenth part so gross and so discourteous, you would most righteously have broke my head. It would have been in your part, as lover, to protect her from such insolence. Protect her first, then, from yourself."

"Ay," quoth Mr. Gottesheim, who had been looking on with his hands behind his tall old back, "ay, that's Scripture truth."

Fritz was staggered, not only by the Prince's imperturbable superiority of manner, but by a glimmering consciousness that he himself was in the wrong. The appeal to liberal doctrines had, besides, unmanned him.

"Well," said he, "if I was rude, I'll own to it. I meant no ill, and did nothing out of my just rights; but I am above all these old vulgar notions too; and if I spoke sharp, I'll ask her pardon."

"Freely granted, Fritz," said Ottilia.

"But all this doesn't answer me," cried Fritz. "I ask what you two spoke about. She says she promised not to tell; well, then, I mean to know. Civility is

civility; but I'll be no man's gull. I have a right to common justice, if I *do* keep company!"

"If you will ask Mr. Gottesheim," replied Otto, "you will find I have not spent my hours in idleness. I have, since I arose this morning, agreed to buy the farm. So far I will go to satisfy a curiosity which I condemn."

"O, well, if there was business, that's another matter," returned Fritz. "Though it beats me why you could not tell. But, of course, if the gentleman is to buy the farm, I suppose there would naturally be an end."

"To be sure," said Mr. Gottesheim, with a strong accent of conviction.

But Ottilia was much braver. "There now!" she cried in triumph. "What did I tell you? I told you I was fighting your battles. Now you see! Think shame of your suspicious temper! You should go down upon your bended knees both to that gentleman and me."

CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH THE PRINCE COLLECTS OPINIONS BY THE WAY

A LITTLE before noon, Otto, by a triumph of manœuvring, effected his escape. He was quit in this way of the ponderous gratitude of Mr. Killian, and of the confidential gratitude of poor Ottilia; but of Fritz he was not quit so readily. That young politician, brimming with mysterious glances, offered to lend his convoy as far as to the high-road; and Otto, in fear of some residuary jealousy, and for the girl's sake, had not the courage to gainsay him; but he regarded his companion with uneasy glances, and devoutly wished the business at an end. For some time Fritz walked by the mare in silence; and they had already traversed more than half the proposed distance when, with something of a blush, he looked up and opened fire.

"Are you not," he asked, "what they call a socialist?"

"Why, no," returned Otto, "not precisely what they call so. Why do you ask?"

"I will tell you why," said the young man. "I saw from the first that you were a red progressional, and nothing but the fear of old Killian kept you back. And there, sir, you were right: old men are always cowards. But nowadays, you see, there are so many groups: you can never tell how far the likeliest kind of man may be prepared to go; and I was never sure you were one of the strong thinkers, till you hinted about women and free love."

"Indeed," cried Otto, "I never said a word of such a thing."

"Not you!" cried Fritz. "Never a word to compromise! You was sowing seed: ground-bait, our president calls it. But it's hard to deceive me, for I know all the agitators and their ways, and all the doctrines; and between you and me," lowering his voice, "I am myself affiliated. O yes, I am a secret society man, and here is my medal." And drawing out a green ribbon that he wore about his neck, he held up, for Otto's inspection, a pewter medal bearing the imprint of a Phœnix and the legend *Libertas*. "And so now you see you may trust me," added Fritz. "I am none of your alehouse talkers; I am a convinced revolutionary." And he looked meltingly upon Otto.

"I see," replied the Prince; "that is very gratifying. Well, sir, the great thing for the good of one's country is, first of all, to be a good man. All springs from there. For my part, although you are right in thinking that I have to do with politics, I am unfit by intellect and temper for a leading rôle. I was intended, I fear, for a subaltern. Yet we have all something to command, Mr. Fritz, if it be only our own temper; and a man about to marry must look closely to himself. The husband's, like the prince's, is a very artificial standing; and it is hard to be kind in either. Do you follow that?"

"O yes, I follow that," replied the young man, sadly chop-fallen over the nature of the information he had elicited; and then brightening up: "Is it," he ventured, "is it for an arsenal that you have bought the farm?"

"We'll see about that," the Prince answered, laughing. "You must not be too zealous. And in the meantime, if I were you, I would say nothing on the subject."

"O, trust me, sir, for that," cried Fritz, as he pocketed a crown. "And you've let nothing out; for I suspected —I might say I knew it—from the first. And mind you,

when a guide is required," he added, " I know all the forest paths."

Otto rode away, chuckling. This talk with Fritz had vastly entertained him; nor was he altogether discontented with his bearing at the farm; men, he was able to tell himself, had behaved worse under smaller provocation. And, to harmonise all, the road and the April air were both delightful to his soul.

Up and down, and to and fro, ever mounting through the wooded foothills, the broad, white high-road wound onward into Grünewald. On either hand the pines stood coolly rooted—green moss prospering, springs welling forth between their knuckled spurs; and though some were broad and stalwart, and others spiry and slender, yet all stood firm in the same attitude and with the same expression, like a silent army presenting arms.

The road lay all the way apart from towns and villages, which it left on either hand. Here and there, indeed, in the bottom of green glens, the Prince could spy a few congregated roofs, or perhaps above him, on a shoulder, the solitary cabin of a woodman. But the highway was an international undertaking, and with its face set for distant cities, scorned the little life of Grünewald. Hence it was exceeding solitary. Near the frontier Otto met a detachment of his own troops marching in the hot dust; and he was recognised and somewhat feebly cheered as he rode by. But from that time forth and for a long while he was alone with the great woods.

Gradually the spell of pleasure relaxed; his own thoughts returned, like stinging insects, in a cloud; and the talk of the night before, like a shower of buffets, fell upon his memory. He looked east and west for any comforter; and presently he was aware of a cross-road coming steeply down hill, and a horseman cautiously descending. A human voice or presence, like a spring in the desert, was now welcome in itself, and Otto drew bridle to await the coming of this stranger. He proved to be a very

red-faced, thick-lipped countryman, with a pair of fat saddle-bags and a stone bottle at his waist; who, as soon as the Prince hailed him, jovially, if somewhat thickly, answered. At the same time he gave a beery yaw in the saddle. It was clear his bottle was no longer full.

"Do you ride towards Mittwalden?" asked the Prince.

"As far as the cross-road to Tannenbrunn," the man replied. "Will you bear company?"

"With pleasure. I have even waited for you on the chance," answered Otto.

By this time they were close alongside; and the man, with the country-folk instinct, turned his cloudy vision first of all on his companion's mount. "The devil!" he cried. "You ride a bonny mare, friend!" And then his curiosity being satisfied about the essential, he turned his attention to that merely secondary matter, his companion's face. He started. "The Prince!" he cried, saluting, with another yaw that came near dismounting him. "I beg your pardon, your Highness, not to have reco'nised you at once."

The Prince was vexed out of his self-possession. "Since you know me," he said, "it is unnecessary we should ride together. I will precede you, if you please." And he was about to set spur to the grey mare, when the half-drunken fellow, reaching over, laid his hand upon the rein.

"Hark you," he said, "prince or no prince, that is not how one man should conduct himself with another. What! You'll ride with me incog. and set me talking! But if I know you, you'll preshede me, if you please! Spy!" And the fellow, crimson with drink and injured vanity, almost spat the word into the Prince's face.

A horrid confusion came over Otto. He perceived that he had acted rudely, grossly presuming on his station. And perhaps a little shiver of physical alarm mingled with

his remorse, for the fellow was very powerful, and not more than half in the possession of his senses. "Take your hand from my rein," he said, with a sufficient assumption of command; and when the man, rather to his wonder, had obeyed: "You should understand, sir," he added, "that while I might be glad to ride with you as one person of sagacity with another, and so receive your true opinions, it would amuse me very little to hear the empty compliments you would address to me as Prince."

"You think I would lie, do you?" cried the man with the bottle, purpling deeper.

"I know you would," returned Otto, entering entirely into his self-possession. "You would not even show me the medal you wear about your neck." For he had caught a glimpse of a green ribbon at the fellow's throat.

The change was instantaneous: the red face became mottled with yellow; a thick-fingered, tottering hand made a clutch at the tell-tale ribbon. "Medal!" the man cried, wonderfully sobered. "I have no medal."

"Pardon me," said the Prince. "I will even tell you what that medal bears: a Phœnix burning, with the word *Libertas.*" The medallist remaining speechless, "You are a pretty fellow," continued Otto, smiling, "to complain of incivility from the man whom you conspire to murder."

"Murder!" protested the man. "Nay, never that; nothing criminal for me!"

"You are strangely misinformed," said Otto. "Conspiracy itself is criminal, and ensures the pain of death. Nay, sir, death it is; I will guarantee my accuracy. Not that you need be so deplorably affected, for I am no officer. But those who mingle with politics should look at both sides of the medal."

"Your Highness . . ." began the knight of the bottle.

"Nonsense! you are a Republican," cried Otto; "what have you to do with highnesses? But let us

continue to ride forward. Since you so much desire it, I cannot find it in my heart to deprive you of my company. And for that matter, I have a question to address to you. Why, being so great a body of men—for you are a great body—fifteen thousand, I have heard, but that will be understated; am I right?"

The man gurgled in his throat.

"Why, then, being so considerable a party," resumed Otto, "do you not come before me boldly with your wants?—what do I say? with your commands? Have I the name of being passionately devoted to my throne? I can scarce suppose it. Come, then; show me your majority, and I will instantly resign. Tell this to your friends; assure them from me of my docility; assure them that, however they conceive of my deficiencies, they cannot suppose me more unfit to be a ruler than I do myself. I am one of the worst princes in Europe; will they improve on that?"

"Far be it from me . . ." the man began.

"See, now, if you will not defend my government!" cried Otto. "If I were you, I would leave conspiracies. You are as little fit to be a conspirator as I to be a king."

"One thing I will say out," said the man. "It is not so much you that we complain of, it's your lady."

"Not a word, sir," said the Prince; and then after a moment's pause, and in tones of some anger and contempt: "I once more advise you to have done with politics," he added; "and when next I see you, let me see you sober. A morning drunkard is the last man to sit in judgment even upon the worst of princes."

"I have had a drop, but I had not been drinking," the man replied, triumphing in a sound distinction. "And if I had, what then? Nobody hangs by me. But my mill is standing idle, and I blame it on your wife. Am I alone in that? Go round and ask. Where are the mills? Where are the young men that should be working? Where is the currency? All paralysed. No, sir, it is not equal;

for I suffer for your faults—I pay for them, by George, out of a poor man's pocket. And what have you to do with mine? Drunk or sober, I can see my country going to hell, and I can see whose fault it is. And so now, I've said my say, and you may drag me to a stinking dungeon; what care I? I've spoke the truth, and so I'll hold hard, and not intrude upon your Highness's society."

And the miller reined up and, clumsily enough, saluted.

"You will observe, I have not asked your name," said Otto. "I wish you a good ride," and he rode on hard. But let him ride as he pleased, this interview with the miller was a chokepear, which he could not swallow. He had begun by receiving a reproof in manners, and ended by sustaining a defeat in logic, both from a man whom he despised. All his old thoughts returned with fresher venom. And by three in the afternoon, coming to the cross-roads for Beckstein, Otto decided to turn aside and dine there leisurely. Nothing at least could be worse than to go on as he was going.

In the inn at Beckstein he remarked, immediately upon his entrance, an intelligent young gentleman dining, with a book in front of him. He had his own place laid close to the reader, and with a proper apology, broke ground by asking what he read.

"I am perusing," answered the young gentleman, "the last work of the Herr Doctor Hohenstockwitz, cousin and librarian of your Prince here in Grünewald—a man of great erudition and some lambencies of wit."

"I am acquainted," said Otto, "with the Herr Doctor, though not yet with his work."

"Two privileges that I must envy you," replied the young man politely: "an honour in hand, a pleasure in the bush."

"The Herr Doctor is a man much respected, I believe, for his attainments?" asked the Prince.

"He is, sir, a remarkable instance of the force of intellect," replied the reader. "Who of our young men know

anything of his cousin, all-reigning Prince although he be? Who but has heard of Dr. Gotthold? But intellectual merit, alone of all distinctions, has its base in nature."

"I have the gratification of addressing a student—perhaps an author?" Otto suggested.

The young man somewhat flushed. "I have some claim to both distinctions, sir, as you suppose," said he; "there is my card. I am the licentiate Roederer, author of several works on the theory and practice of politics."

"You immensely interest me," said the Prince; "the more so as I gather that here in Grünewald we are on the brink of revolution. Pray, since these have been your special studies, would you augur hopefully of such a movement?"

"I perceive," said the young author, with a certain vinegary twitch, "that you are unacquainted with my opuscula. I am a convinced authoritarian. I share none of those illusory, Utopian fancies with which empirics blind themselves and exasperate the ignorant. The day of these ideas is, believe me, past, or at least passing."

"When I look about me——" began Otto.

"When you look about you," interrupted the licentiate, "you behold the ignorant. But in the laboratory of opinion, beside the studious lamp, we begin already to discard these figments. We begin to return to nature's order, to what I might call, if I were to borrow from the language of therapeutics, the expectant treatment of abuses. You will not misunderstand me," he continued: "a country in the condition in which we find Grünewald, a prince such as your Prince Otto, we must explicitly condemn; they are behind the age. But I would look for a remedy not to brute convulsions, but to the natural supervenience of a more able sovereign. I should amuse you, perhaps," added the licentiate, with a smile, "I think I should amuse you if I were to explain my notion of a prince. We who have studied in the closet, no longer, in this age, propose ourselves for active service. The paths,

we have perceived, are incompatible. I would not have a student on the throne, though I would have one near by for an adviser. I would set forward as prince a man of a good, medium understanding, lively rather than deep; a man of courtly manner, possessed of the double art to ingratiate and to command; receptive, accommodating, seductive. I have been observing you since your first entrance. Well, sir, were I a subject of Grünewald I should pray Heaven to set upon the seat of government just such another as yourself."

"The devil you would!" exclaimed the Prince.

The licentiate Roederer laughed most heartily. "I thought I should astonish you," he said. "These are not the ideas of the masses."

"They are not, I can assure you," Otto said.

"Or rather," distinguished the licentiate, "not to-day. The time will come, however, when these ideas shall prevail."

"You will permit me, sir, to doubt it," said Otto.

"Modesty is always admirable," chuckled the theorist. "But yet I assure you, a man like you, with such a man as, say, Dr. Gotthold at your elbow, would be, for all practical issues, my ideal ruler."

At this rate the hours sped pleasantly for Otto. But the licentiate unfortunately slept that night at Beckstein, where he was, being dainty in the saddle and given to half stages. And to find a convoy to Mittwalden, and thus mitigate the company of his own thoughts, the Prince had to make favour with a certain party of wood-merchants from various states of the empire, who had been drinking together somewhat noisily at the far end of the apartment.

The night had already fallen when they took the saddle. The merchants were very loud and mirthful; each had a face like a nor'-west moon; and they played pranks with each other's horses, and mingled songs and choruses, and alternately remembered and forgot the

companion of their ride. Otto thus combined society and solitude, hearkening now to their chattering and empty talk, now to the voices of the encircling forest. The star-lit dark, the faint wood airs, the clank of the horse-shoes making broken music, accorded together and attuned his mind, and he was still in a most equal temper when the party reached the top of that long hill that overlooks Mittwalden.

Down in the bottom of a bowl of forest, the lights of the little formal town glittered in a pattern, street crossing street; away by itself on the right, the palace was glowing like a factory.

Although he knew not Otto, one of the wood-merchants was a native of the state. "There," said he, pointing to the palace with his whip, "there is Jezebel's inn."

"What, do you call it that?" cried another, laughing.

"Ay that's what they call it," returned the Grünewalder; and he broke into a song, which the rest, as people well acquainted with the words and air, instantly took up in chorus. Her Serene Highness Amalia Seraphina, Princess of Grünewald, was the heroine, Gondremark the hero of this ballad. Shame hissed in Otto's ears. He reined up short and sat stunned in the saddle; and the singers continued to descend the hill without him.

The song went to a rough, swashing, popular air; and long after the words became inaudible the swing of the music, rising and falling, echoed insult in the Prince's brain. He fled the sounds. Hard by him on his right a road struck towards the palace, and he followed it through the thick shadows and branching alleys of the park. It was a busy place on a fine summer's afternoon, when the court and burghers met and saluted; but at that hour of the night in the early spring it was deserted to the roosting birds. Hares rustled among the covert; here and there a statue stood glimmering, with its eternal

gesture ; here and there the echo of an imitation temple clattered ghostly to the trampling of the mare. Ten minutes brought him to the upper end of his own home garden, where the small stables opened, over a bridge, upon the park. The yard clock was striking the hour of ten ; so was the big bell in the palace bell-tower ; and, farther off, the belfries of the town. About the stable all else was silent but the stamping of stalled horses and the rattle of halters. Otto dismounted ; and as he did so a memory came back to him : a whisper of dishonest grooms and stolen corn, once heard, long forgotten, and now recurring in the nick of opportunity. He crossed the bridge, and, going up to a window, knocked six or seven heavy blows in a particular cadence, and, as he did so, smiled. Presently a wicket was opened in the gate, and a man's head appeared in the dim starlight.

" Nothing to-night," said a voice.

" Bring a lantern," said the Prince.

" Dear heart a' mercy ! " cried the groom. " Who's that ? "

" It is I, the Prince," replied Otto. " Bring a lantern, take in the mare, and let me through into the garden."

The man remained silent for a while, his head still projecting through the wicket.

" His Highness ! " he said at last. " And why did your Highness knock so strange ? "

" It is a superstition in Mittwalden," answered Otto, " that it cheapens corn."

With a sound like a sob the groom fled. He was very white when he returned, even by the light of the lantern ; and his hand trembled as he undid the fastenings and took the mare.

" Your Highness," he began at last, " for God's sake. . . . " And there he paused, oppressed with guilt.

" For God's sake, what ? " asked Otto cheerfully. " For God's sake let us have cheaper corn, say I. Good-

night!" And he strode off into the garden, leaving the groom petrified once more.

The garden descended by a succession of stone terraces to the level of the fish-pond. On the far side the ground rose again, and was crowned by the confused roofs and gables of the palace. The modern pillared front, the ball-room, the great library, the princely apartments, the busy and illuminated quarters of that great house, all faced the town. The garden side was much older; and here it was almost dark; only a few windows quietly lighted at various elevations. The great square tower rose, thinning by stages like a telescope; and on the top of all the flag hung motionless.

The garden, as it now lay in the dusk and glimmer of the starshine, breathed of April violets. Under night's cavern arch the shrubs obscurely bustled. Through the plotted terraces and down the marble stairs the Prince rapidly descended, fleeing before uncomfortable thoughts. But, alas! from these there is no city of refuge. And now, when he was about midway of the descent, distant strains of music began to fall upon his ear from the ball-room, where the court was dancing. They reached him faint and broken, but they touched the keys of memory; and through and above them, Otto heard the ranting melody of the wood-merchants' song. Mere blackness seized upon his mind. Here he was coming home; the wife was dancing, the husband had been playing a trick upon a lackey; and meanwhile, all about them, they were a by-word to their subjects. Such a prince, such a husband, such a man, as this Otto had become! And he sped the faster onward.

Some way below he came unexpectedly upon a sentry; yet a little farther, and he was challenged by a second; and as he crossed the bridge over the fish-pond, an officer making the rounds stopped him once more. The parade of watch was more than usual; but curiosity was dead in Otto's mind, and he only chafed at the interruption.

The porter of the back postern admitted him, and started to behold him so disordered. Thence, hasting by private stairs and passages, he came at length unseen to his own chamber, tore off his clothes, and threw himself upon his bed in the dark. The music of the ball-room still continued to a very lively measure ; and still, behind that, he heard in spirit the chorus of the merchants clanking down the hill.

BOOK II

OF LOVE AND POLITICS

CHAPTER I

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE LIBRARY

At a quarter before six on the following morning Dr. Gotthold was already at his desk in the library; and with a small cup of black coffee at his elbow, and an eye occasionally wandering to the busts and the long array of many-coloured books, was quietly reviewing the labours of the day before. He was a man of about forty, flaxen-haired, with refined features a little worn, and bright eyes somewhat faded. Early to bed and early to rise, his life was devoted to two things: erudition and Rhine wine. An ancient friendship existed latent between him and Otto; they rarely met, but when they did it was to take up at once the thread of their suspended intimacy. Gotthold, the virgin priest of knowledge, had envied his cousin, for half a day, when he was married; he had never envied him his throne.

Reading was not a popular diversion at the court of Grünewald; and that great, pleasant, sunshiny gallery of books and statues was, in practice, Gotthold's private cabinet. On this particular Wednesday morning, however, he had not been long about his manuscript when a door opened and the Prince stepped into the apartment. The Doctor watched him as he drew near, receiving, from each of the embayed windows in succession, a flush of morning sun; and Otto looked so gay, and walked so airily, he was so well dressed and brushed and frizzled, so *point-device*, and of such a sovereign elegance, that the heart of his cousin the recluse was rather moved against him.

" Good-morning, Gotthold," said Otto, dropping in a chair.

" Good-morning, Otto," returned the librarian. " You are an early bird. Is this an accident, or do you begin reforming ? "

" It is about time, I fancy," answered the Prince.

" I cannot imagine," said the Doctor. " I am too sceptical to be an ethical adviser ; and as for good resolutions, I believed in them when I was young. They are the colours of hope's rainbow."

" If you come to think of it," said Otto, " I am not a popular sovereign." And with a look he changed his statement to a question.

" Popular ? Well, there I would distinguish," answered Gotthold, leaning back and joining the tips of his fingers. " There are various kinds of popularity : the bookish, which is perfectly impersonal, as unreal as the nightmare ; the politician's, a mixed variety ; and yours, which is the most personal of all. Women take to you ; footmen adore you ; it is as natural to like you as to pat a dog ; and were you a saw-miller you would be the most popular citizen in Grünewald. As a prince—well, you are in the wrong trade. It is perhaps philosophical to recognise it as you do."

" Perhaps philosophical ? " repeated Otto.

" Yes, perhaps. I would not be dogmatic," answered Gotthold.

" Perhaps philosophical, and certainly not virtuous," Otto resumed.

" Not of a Roman virtue," chuckled the recluse.

Otto drew his chair nearer to the table, leaned upon it with his elbow, and looked his cousin squarely in the face. " In short," he asked, " not manly ? "

" Well," Gotthold hesitated, " not manly, if you will." And then, with a laugh, " I did not know that you gave yourself out to be manly," he added. " It was one of the points that I inclined to like about you ; inclined, I

believe, to admire. The names of virtues exercise a charm on most of us; we must lay claim to all of them, however incompatible; we must all be both daring and prudent; we must all vaunt our pride and go to the stake for our humility. Not so you. Without compromise you were yourself: a pretty sight. I have always said it: none so void of all pretence as Otto."

"Pretence and effort both!" cried Otto. "A dead dog in a canal is more alive. And the question, Gotthold, the question that I have to face is this: Can I not, with effort and self-denial, can I not become a tolerable sovereign?"

"Never," replied Gotthold. "Dismiss the notion. And besides, dear child, you would not try."

"Nay, Gotthold, I am not to be put by," said Otto. "If I am constitutionally unfit to be a sovereign, what am I doing with this money, with this palace, with these guards? And I—a thief—am I to execute the law on others?"

"I admit the difficulty," said Gotthold.

"Well, can I not try?" continued Otto. "Am I not bound to try? And with the advice and help of such a man as you——"

"Me!" cried the librarian. "Now, God forbid!"

Otto, though he was in no very smiling humour, could not forbear to smile. "Yet I was told last night," he laughed, "that with a man like me to impersonate, and a man like you to touch the springs, a very possible government could be composed."

"Now I wonder in what diseased imagination," Gotthold said, "that preposterous monster saw the light of day?"

"It was one of your own trade—a writer: one Roederer," said Otto.

"Roederer! an ignorant puppy!" cried the librarian.

"You are ungrateful," said Otto. "He is one of your professed admirers."

"Is he?" cried Gotthold, obviously impressed. "Come, that is a good account of the young man. I must read his stuff again. It is the rather to his credit, as our views are opposite. The east and west are not more opposite. Can I have converted him? But no; the incident belongs to Fairyland."

"You are not then," asked the Prince, "an authoritarian?"

"I? God bless me, no!" said Gotthold. "I am a red, dear child."

"That brings me then to my next point, and by a natural transition. If I am so clearly unfitted for my post," the Prince asked: "if my friends admit it, if my subjects clamour for my downfall, if revolution is preparing at this hour, must I not go forth to meet the inevitable? should I not save these horrors and be done with these absurdities? in a word, should I not abdicate? O, believe me, I feel the ridicule, the vast abuse of language," he added, wincing, "but even a principulus like me cannot resign; he must make a great gesture, and come buskined forth, and abdicate."

"Ay," said Gotthold, "or else stay where he is. What gnat has bitten you to-day? Do you not know that you are touching, with lay hands, the very holiest inwards of philosophy, where madness dwells? Ay, Otto, madness; for in the serene temples of the wise, the inmost shrine, which we carefully keep locked, is full of spiders' webs. All men, all, are fundamentally useless; nature tolerates, she does not need, she does not use them: sterile flowers! All—down to the fellow swinking in a byre, whom fools point out for the exception—all are useless; all weave ropes of sand; or, like a child that has breathed on a window, write and obliterate, write and obliterate, idle words! Talk of it no more. That way, I tell you, madness lies." The speaker rose from his chair and then sat down again. He laughed a little laugh, and then, changing his tone, resumed: "Yes, dear child, we are

not here to do battle with giants ; we are here to be happy like the flowers, if we can be. It is because you could, that I have always secretly admired you. Cling to that trade ; believe me, it is the right one. Be happy, be idle, be airy. To the devil with all casuistry ! and leave the state to Gondremark, as heretofore. He does it well enough, they say ; and his vanity enjoys the situation."

" Gotthold," cried Otto, " what is this to me ? Useless is not the question ; I cannot rest at uselessness ; I must be useful or I must be noxious—one or other. I grant you the whole thing, prince and principality alike, is pure absurdity, a stroke of satire ; and that a banker or the man who keeps an inn has graver duties. But now, when I have washed my hands of it three years, and left all —labour, responsibility, and honour and enjoyment too, if there be any—to Gondremark and to—Seraphina——" He hesitated at the name, and Gotthold glanced aside. " Well," the Prince continued, " what has come of it ? Taxes, army, cannon—why, it's like a box of lead soldiers ! And the people sick at the folly of it, and fired with the injustice ! And war, too—I hear of war—war in this teapot ! What a complication of absurdity and disgrace ! And when the inevitable end arrives—the revolution—who will be to blame in the sight of God, who will be gibbeted in public opinion ? I ! Prince Puppet ! "

" I thought you had despised public opinion," said Gotthold.

" I did," said Otto sombrely, " but now I do not. I am growing old. And then, Gotthold, there is Seraphina. She is loathed in this country that I brought her to and suffered her to spoil. Yes, I gave it her as a plaything, and she has broken it : a fine Prince, an admirable Princess ! Even her life—I ask you, Gotthold, is her life safe ? "

" It is safe enough to-day," replied the librarian : " but since you ask me seriously, I would not answer for to-morrow. She is ill-advised."

"And by whom? By this Gondremark, to whom you counsel me to leave my country," cried the Prince. "Rare advice! The course that I have been following all these years, to come at last to this. O, ill-advised! if that were all! See now, there is no sense in beating about the bush between two men: you know what scandal says of her?"

Gotthold, with pursed lips, silently nodded.

"Well, come, you are not very cheering as to my conduct as the Prince; have I even done my duty as a husband?" Otto asked.

"Nay, nay," said Gotthold, earnestly and eagerly, "this is another chapter. I am an old celibate, an old monk. I cannot advise you in your marriage."

"Nor do I require advice," said Otto, rising. "All of this must cease." And he began to walk to and fro with his hands behind his back.

"Well, Otto, may God guide you!" said Gotthold, after a considerable silence. "I cannot."

"From what does all this spring?" said the Prince, stopping in his walk. "What am I to call it? Diffidence? The fear of ridicule? Inverted vanity? What matter names, if it has brought me to this? I could never bear to be bustling about nothing; I was ashamed of this toy kingdom from the first; I could not tolerate that people should fancy I believed in a thing so patently absurd! I would do nothing that cannot be done smiling. I have a sense of humour, forsooth! I must know better than my Maker. And it was the same thing in my marriage," he added more hoarsely. "I did not believe this girl could care for me; I must not intrude; I must preserve the foppery of my indifference. What an impotent picture!"

"Ay, we have the same blood," moralised Gotthold. "You are drawing, with fine strokes, the character of the born sceptic."

"Sceptic? — coward!" cried Otto. "Coward is

the word. A springless, putty-hearted, cowering coward ! "

And as the Prince rapped out the words in tones of unusual vigour, a little, stout old gentleman, opening a door behind Gotthold, received them fairly in the face. With his parrot's beak for a nose, his pursed mouth, his little goggling eyes, he was the picture of formality ; and in ordinary circumstances, strutting behind the drum of his corporation, he impressed the beholder with a certain air of frozen dignity and wisdom. But at the smallest contrariety, his trembling hands and disconnected gestures betrayed the weakness at the root. And now. when he was thus surprisingly received in that library of Mittwalden Palace, which was the customary haunt of silence, his hands went up into the air as if he had been shot, and he cried aloud with the scream of an old woman.

" O ! " he gasped, recovering, " your Highness ! I beg ten thousand pardons. But your Highness at such an hour in the library !—a circumstance so unusual as your Highness's presence was a thing I could not be expected to foresee."

" There is no harm done, Herr Cancellarius," said Otto.

" I came upon the errand of a moment : some papers I left over-night with the Herr Doctor," said the Chancellor of Grünewald.—" Herr Doctor, if you will kindly give me them, I will intrude no longer."

Gotthold unlocked a drawer and handed a bundle of manuscript to the old gentleman, who prepared, with fitting salutations, to take his departure.

" Herr Greisengesang, since we have met," said Otto, " let us talk."

" I am honoured by his Highness's commands," replied the Chancellor.

" All has been quiet since I left ? " asked the Prince, resuming his seat.

" The usual business, your Highness," answered Greis-

engesang; "punctual trifles: huge, indeed, if neglected, but trifles when discharged. Your Highness is most zealously obeyed."

"Obeyed, Herr Cancellarius?" returned the Prince. "And when have I obliged you with an order? Replaced, let us rather say. But to touch upon these trifles; instance me a few."

"The routine of government, from which your Highness has so wisely dissociated his leisure . . ." began Greisengesang.

"We will leave my leisure, sir," said Otto. "Approach the facts."

"The routine of business was proceeded with," replied the official, now visibly twittering.

"It is very strange, Herr Cancellarius, that you should so persistently avoid my questions," said the Prince. "You tempt me to suppose a purpose in your dulness. I have asked you whether all was quiet; do me the pleasure to reply."

"Perfectly—O, perfectly quiet," jerked the ancient puppet, with every signal of untruth.

"I make a note of these words," said the Prince gravely. "You assure me, your sovereign, that since the date of my departure nothing has occurred of which you owe me an account."

"I take your Highness, I take the Herr Doctor to witness," cried Greisengesang, "that I have had no such expression."

"Halt!" said the Prince; and then, after a pause: "Herr Greisengesang, you are an old man, and you served my father before you served me," he added. "It consists neither with your dignity nor mine that you should babble excuses and stumble possibly upon untruths. Collect your thoughts; and then categorically inform me of all you have been charged to hide."

Gotthold, stooping very low over his desk, appeared to have resumed his labours; but his shoulders heaved with

subterranean merriment. The Prince waited, drawing his handkerchief quietly through his fingers.

"Your Highness, in this informal manner," said the old gentleman at last, "and being unavoidably deprived of documents, it would be difficult, it would be impossible, to do justice to the somewhat grave occurrences which have transpired."

"I will not criticise your attitude," replied the Prince. "I desire that, between you and me, all should be done gently; for I have not forgotten, my old friend, that you were kind to me from the first, and for a period of years a faithful servant. I will thus dismiss the matters on which you waive immediate inquiry. But you have certain papers actually in your hand. Come, Herr Greisengesang, there is at least one point for which you have authority. Enlighten me on that."

"On that?" cried the old gentleman. "O, that is a trifle; a matter, your Highness, of police; a detail of a purely administrative order. These are simply a selection of the papers seized upon the English traveller."

"Seized?" echoed Otto. "In what sense? Explain yourself."

"Sir John Crabtree," interposed Gotthold, looking up, "was arrested yesterday evening."

"Is this so, Herr Cancellarius?" demanded Otto sternly.

"It was judged right, your Highness," protested Greisengesang. "The decree was in due form, invested with your Highness's authority by procuration. I am but an agent; I had no status to prevent the measure."

"This man, my guest, has been arrested," said the Prince. "On what grounds, sir? With what colour of pretence?"

The Chancellor stammered.

"Your Highness will perhaps find the reason in these documents," said Gotthold, pointing with the tail of his pen.

Otto thanked his cousin with a look. "Give them to me," he said, addressing the Chancellor.

But that gentleman visibly hesitated to obey. "Baron von Gondremark," he said, "has made the affair his own. I am in this case a mere messenger; and as such, I am not clothed with any capacity to communicate the documents I carry. Herr Doctor, I am convinced you will not fail to bear me out."

"I have heard a great deal of nonsense," said Gotthold, "and most of it from you; but this beats all."

"Come, sir," said Otto, rising, "the papers. I command."

Herr Greisengesang instantly gave way.

"With your Highness's permission," he said, "and laying at his feet my most submiss apologies, I will now hasten to attend his further orders in the Chancery."

"Herr Cancellarius, do you see this chair?" said Otto. "There is where you shall attend my further orders. Oh, now, no more!" he cried, with a gesture, as the old man opened his lips. "You have sufficiently marked your zeal to your employer; and I begin to weary of a moderation you abuse."

The Chancellor moved to the appointed chair and took his seat in silence.

"And now," said Otto, opening the roll, "what is all this? It looks like the manuscript of a book."

"It is," said Gotthold, "the manuscript of a book of travels."

"You have read it, Dr. Hohenstockwitz?" asked the Prince.

"Nay, I but saw the title-page," replied Gotthold. "But the roll was given to me open, and I heard no word of any secrecy."

Otto dealt the Chancellor an angry glance.

"I see," he went on. "The papers of an author seized at this date of the world's history, in a state so petty and so ignorant as Grünewald, here is indeed an

ignominious folly. Sir," to the Chancellor, " I marvel to find you in so scurvy an employment. On your conduct to your Prince I will not dwell ; but to descend to be a spy ! For what else can it be called ? To seize the papers of this gentleman, the private papers of a stranger, the toil of a life, perhaps—to open, and to read them. And what have we to do with books ? The Herr Doctor might perhaps be asked for his advice ; but we have no *index expurgatorius* in Grünewald. Had we but that, we should be the most absolute parody and farce upon this tawdry earth."

Yet, even while Otto spoke, he had continued to unfold the roll ; and now, when it lay fully open, his eye rested on the title-page elaborately written in red ink. It ran thus :

MEMOIRS
OF A VISIT TO THE VARIOUS
COURTS OF EUROPE
BY
SIR JOHN CRABTREE, BARONET

Below was a list of chapters, each bearing the name of one of the European Courts ; and among these the nineteenth and the last upon the list was dedicated to Grünewald.

" Ah ! The Court of Grünewald ! " said Otto, " that should be droll reading." And his curiosity itched for it.

" A methodical dog, this English Baronet," said Gotthold. " Each chapter written and finished on the spot. I shall look for his work when it appears."

" It would be odd, now, just to glance at it," said Otto, wavering.

Gotthold's brow darkened, and he looked out of window.

But though the Prince understood the reproof, his weakness prevailed. " I will," he said, with an uneasy laugh, " I will, I think, just glance at it."

So saying, he resumed his seat and spread the traveller's manuscript upon the table.

CHAPTER II

"ON THE COURT OF GRÜNEWALD," BEING A PORTION OF THE TRAVELLER'S MANUSCRIPT

It may well be asked (*it was thus the English traveller began his nineteenth chapter*) why I should have chosen Grünewald out of so many other states equally petty, formal, dull, and corrupt. Accident, indeed, decided, and not I; but I have seen no reason to regret my visit. The spectacle of this small society macerating in its own abuses was not perhaps instructive, but I have found it exceedingly diverting.

The reigning Prince, Otto Johann Friedrich, a young man of imperfect education, questionable valour, and no scintilla of capacity, has fallen into entire public contempt. It was with difficulty that I obtained an interview, for he is frequently absent from a court where his presence is unheeded, and where his only rôle is to be a cloak for the amours of his wife. At last, however, on the third occasion when I visited the palace, I found this sovereign in the exercise of his inglorious function, with the wife on one hand and the lover on the other. He is not ill-looking; he has hair of a ruddy gold, which naturally curls, and his eyes are dark, a combination which I always regard as the mark of some congenital deficiency, physical or moral; his features are irregular but pleasing; the nose perhaps a little short, and the mouth a little womanish; his address is excellent, and he can express himself with point. But to pierce below these externals is to come on a vacuity of any sterling quality, a deliquescence of the moral nature, a frivolity and in-

consequence of purpose that mark the nearly perfect fruit of a decadent age. He has a worthless smattering of many subjects, but a grasp of none. "I soon weary of a pursuit," he said to me, laughing; it would almost appear as if he took a pride in his incapacity and lack of moral courage. The results of his dilettanteism are to be seen in every field; he is a bad fencer, a second-rate horseman, dancer, shot; he sings—I have heard him—and he sings like a child; he writes intolerable verses in more than doubtful French; he acts like the common amateur; and in short there is no end to the number of things that he does, and does badly. His one manly taste is for the chase. In sum, he is but a plexus of weaknesses; the singing chambermaid of the stage, tricked out in man's apparel, and mounted on a circus horse. I have seen this poor phantom of a prince riding out alone or with a few huntsmen, disregarded by all, and I have been even grieved for the bearer of so futile and melancholy an existence. The last Merovingians may have looked not otherwise.

The Princess Amalia Seraphina, a daughter of the Grand-Ducal house of Toggenburg-Tannhäuser, would be equally inconsiderable if she were not a cutting instrument in the hands of an ambitious man. She is much younger than the Prince, a girl of two-and-twenty, sick with vanity, superficially clever, and fundamentally a fool. She has a red-brown rolling eye, too large for her face, and with sparks of both levity and ferocity; her forehead is high and narrow, her figure thin and a little stooping. Her manners, her conversation, which she interlards with French, her very tastes and ambitions, are alike assumed, and the assumption is ungracefully apparent: Hoyden playing Cleopatra. I should judge her to be incapable of truth. In private life a girl of this description embroils the peace of families, walks attended by a troop of scowling swains, and passes, once at least, through the divorce court; it is a common and, except

to the cynic, an uninteresting type. On the throne, however, and in the hands of a man like Gondremark, she may become the authoress of serious public evils.

Gondremark, the true ruler of this unfortunate country, is a more complex study. His position in Grünewald, to which he is a foreigner, is eminently false ; and that he should maintain it as he does, a very miracle of impudence and dexterity. His speech, his face, his policy, are all double : heads and tails. Which of the two extremes may be his actual design he were a bold man who should offer to decide. Yet I will hazard the guess that he follows both experimentally, and awaits, at the hand of destiny, one of those directing hints of which she is so lavish to the wise.

On the one hand, as *Maire du Palais* to the incompetent Otto, and using the love-sick Princess for a tool and mouthpiece, he pursues a policy of arbitrary power and territorial aggrandisement. He has called out the whole capable male population of the state to military service ; he has bought cannon ; he has tempted away promising officers from foreign armies ; and he now begins, in his international relations, to assume the swaggering port and the vague threatful language of a bully. The idea of extending Grünewald may appear absurd, but the little state is advantageously placed, its neighbours are all defenceless ; and if at any moment the jealousies of the greater courts should neutralise each other, an active policy might double the principality both in population and extent. Certainly at least the scheme is entertained in the court of Mittwalden ; nor do I myself regard it as entirely desperate. The margravate of Brandenburg has grown from as small beginnings to a formidable power ; and though it is late in the day to try adventurous policies, and the age of war seems ended, Fortune, we must not forget, still blindly turns her wheel for men and nations. Concurrently with, and tributary to, these warlike preparations, crushing taxes have been levied,

journals have been suppressed, and the country, which three years ago was prosperous and happy, now stagnates in a forced inaction, gold has become a curiosity, and the mills stand idle on the mountain streams.

On the other hand, in his second capacity of popular tribune, Gondremark is the incarnation of the free lodges, and sits at the centre of an organised conspiracy against the state. To any such movement my sympathies were early acquired, and I would not willingly let fall a word that might embarrass or retard the revolution. But to show that I speak of knowledge, and not as the reporter of mere gossip, I may mention that I have myself been present at a meeting where the details of a republican Constitution were minutely debated and arranged; and I may add that Gondremark was throughout referred to by the speakers as their captain in action and the arbiter of their disputes. He has taught his dupes (for so I must regard them) that his power of resistance to the Princess is limited, and at each fresh stretch of authority persuades them, with specious reasons, to postpone the hour of insurrection. Thus (to give some instances of his astute diplomacy) he salved over the decree enforcing military service, under the plea that to be well drilled and exercised in arms was even a necessary preparation for revolt. And the other day, when it began to be rumoured abroad that a war was being forced on a reluctant neighbour, the Grand Duke of Gerolstein, and I made sure it would be the signal for an instant rising, I was struck dumb with wonder to find that even this had been prepared and was to be accepted. I went from one to another in the Liberal camp, and all were in the same story, all had been drilled and schooled and fitted out with vacuous argument. " The lads had better see some real fighting," they said; " and besides, it will be as well to capture Gerolstein; we can then extend to our neighbours the blessing of liberty on the same day that we snatch it for ourselves; and the republic will be all the stronger to

resist, if the kings of Europe should band themselves together to reduce it." I know not which of the two I should admire the more: the simplicity of the multitude or the audacity of the adventurer. But such are the subtleties, such the quibbling reasons, with which he blinds and leads this people. How long a course so tortuous can be pursued with safety I am incapable of guessing; not long, one would suppose; and yet this singular man has been treading the mazes for five years, and his favour at court and his popularity among the lodges still endure unbroken.

I have the privilege of slightly knowing him. Heavily and somewhat clumsily built, of a vast, disjointed, rambling frame, he can still pull himself together, and figure, not without admiration, in the saloon or the ball-room. His hue and temperament are plentifully bilious; he has a saturnine eye; his cheek is of a dark blue where he has been shaven. Essentially he is to be numbered among the man-haters, a convinced contemner of his fellows. Yet he is himself of a most commonplace ambition and greedy of applause. In talk, he is remarkable for a thirst of information, loving rather to hear than to communicate; for sound and studious views; and, judging by the extreme short-sightedness of common politicians, for a remarkable prevision of events. All this, however, without grace, pleasantry, or charm, heavily set forth, with a dull countenance. In our numerous conversations, although he has always heard me with deference, I have been conscious throughout of a sort of ponderous finessing hard to tolerate. He produces none of the effect of a gentleman; devoid not merely of pleasantry, but of all attention or communicative warmth of bearing. No gentleman, besides, would so parade his amours with the Princess; still less repay the Prince for his long-suffering with the studied insolence of demeanour and the fabrication of insulting nicknames, such as Prince Featherhead, which run from ear to ear and create a laugh

throughout the country. Gondremark has thus some of the clumsier characters of the self-made man, combined with an inordinate, almost a besotted, pride of intellect and birth. Heavy, bilious, selfish, inornate, he sits upon this court and country like an incubus.

But it is probable that he preserves softer gifts for necessary purposes. Indeed, it is certain, although he vouchsafed none of it to me, that this cold and stolid politician possesses to a great degree the art of ingratiation, and can be all things to all men. Hence there has probably sprung up the idle legend that in private life he is a gross romping voluptuary. Nothing, at least, can well be more surprising than the terms of his connection with the Princess. Older than her husband, certainly uglier, and, according to the feeble ideas common among women, in every particular less pleasing, he has not only seized the complete command of all her thought and action, but has imposed on her in public a humiliating part. I do not here refer to the complete sacrifice of every rag of her reputation; for to many women these extremities are in themselves attractive. But there is about the court a certain lady of a dishevelled reputation, a Countess von Rosen, wife or widow of a cloudy count, no longer in her second youth, and already bereft of some of her attractions, who unequivocally occupies the station of the Baron's mistress. I had thought, at first, that she was but a hired accomplice, a mere blind or buffer for the more important sinner. A few hours' acquaintance with Madame von Rosen for ever dispelled the illusion. She is one rather to make than to prevent a scandal, and she values none of those bribes—money, honours, or employment—with which the situation might be gilded. Indeed, as a person frankly bad, she pleased me, in the court of Grünewald, like a piece of nature.

The power of this man over the Princess is, therefore, without bounds. She has sacrificed to the adoration with which he has inspired her not only her marriage

vow and every shred of public decency, but that vice of jealousy which is so much dearer to the female sex than either intrinsic honour or outward consideration. Nay, more: a young, although not a very attractive woman, and a princess both by birth and fact, she submits to the triumphant rivalry of one who might be her mother as to years, and who is so manifestly her inferior in station. This is one of the mysteries of the human heart. But the rage of illicit love, when it is once indulged, appears to grow by feeding; and to a person of the character and temperament of this unfortunate young lady, almost any depth of degradation is within the reach of possibility.

CHAPTER III

THE PRINCE AND THE ENGLISH TRAVELLER

So far Otto read, with waxing indignation; and here his fury overflowed. He tossed the roll upon the table and stood up. "This man," he said, "is a devil. A filthy imagination, an ear greedy of evil, a ponderous malignity of thought and language: I grow like him by the reading! Chancellor, where is this fellow lodged?"

"He was committed to the Flag Tower," replied Greisengesang, "in the Gamiani apartment."

"Lead me to him," said the Prince; and then, a thought striking him, "Was it for that," he asked, "that I found so many sentries in the garden?"

"Your Highness, I am unaware," answered Greisengesang, true to his policy. "The disposition of the guards is a matter distinct from my functions."

Otto turned upon the old man fiercely, but ere he had time to speak, Gotthold touched him on the arm. He swallowed his wrath with a great effort. "It is well," he said, taking the roll. "Follow me to the Flag Tower."

The Chancellor gathered himself together, and the two set forward. It was a long and complicated voyage; for the library was in the wing of the new buildings, and the tower which carried the flag was in the old schloss upon the garden. By a great variety of stairs and corridors, they came out at last upon a patch of gravelled court; the garden peeped through a high grating with a flash of green; tall, old, gabled buildings mounted on every side; the Flag Tower climbed, stage after stage, into the blue; and high over all, among the building

daws, the yellow flag wavered in the wind. A sentinel at the foot of the tower stairs presented arms; another paced the first landing; and a third was stationed before the door of the extemporised prison.

"We guard this mud-bag like a jewel," Otto sneered.

The Gamiani apartment was so called from an Italian doctor who had imposed on the credulity of a former prince. The rooms were large, airy, pleasant, and looked upon the garden; but the walls were of great thickness (for the tower was old), and the windows were heavily barred. The Prince, followed by the Chancellor, still trotting to keep up with him, brushed swiftly through the little library and the long saloon, and burst like a thunderbolt into the bedroom at the farther end. Sir John was finishing his toilet; a man of fifty, hard, uncompromising, able, with the eye and teeth of physical courage. He was unmoved by the irruption, and bowed with a sort of sneering ease.

"To what am I to attribute the honour of this visit?" he asked.

"You have eaten my bread," replied Otto, "you have taken my hand, you have been received under my roof. When did I fail you in courtesy? What have you asked that was not granted as to an honoured guest? And here, sir," tapping fiercely on the manuscript, "here is your return."

"Your Highness has read my papers?" said the Baronet. "I am honoured indeed. But the sketch is most imperfect. I shall now have much to add. I can say that the Prince, whom I had accused of idleness, is zealous in the department of police, taking upon himself those duties that are most distasteful. I shall be able to relate the burlesque incident of my arrest, and the singular interview with which you honour me at present. For the rest, I have already communicated with my Ambassador at Vienna; and unless you propose to murder me, I shall be at liberty, whether you please or

not, within the week. For I hardly fancy the future empire of Grünewald is yet ripe to go to war with England. I conceive I am a little more than quits. I owe you no explanation; yours has been the wrong. You, if you have studied my writing with intelligence, owe me a large debt of gratitude. And to conclude, as I have not yet finished my toilet, I imagine the courtesy of a turnkey to a prisoner would induce you to withdraw."

There was some paper on the table, and Otto, sitting down, wrote a passport in the name of Sir John Crabtree.

"Affix the seal, Herr Cancellarius," he said, in his most princely manner, as he rose.

Greisengesang produced a red portfolio, and affixed the seal in the unpoetic guise of an adhesive stamp; nor did his perturbed and clumsy movements at all lessen the comedy of the performance. Sir John looked on with a malign enjoyment; and Otto chafed, regretting, when too late, the unnecessary royalty of his command and gesture. But at length the Chancellor had finished his piece of prestidigitation, and, without waiting for an order, had countersigned the passport. Thus regularised, he returned it to Otto with a bow.

"You will now," said the Prince, "order one of my own carriages to be prepared; see it, with your own eyes, charged with Sir John's effects, and have it waiting within the hour behind the Pheasant House. Sir John departs this morning for Vienna."

The Chancellor took his elaborate departure.

"Here, sir, is your passport," said Otto, turning to the Baronet. "I regret it from my heart that you have met inhospitable usage."

"Well, there will be no English war," returned Sir John.

"Nay, sir," said Otto; "you surely owe me your civility. Matters are now changed, and we stand again upon the footing of two gentlemen. It was not I who ordered your arrest; I returned late last night from

hunting; and as you cannot blame me for your imprisonment, you may even thank me for your freedom."

"And yet you read my papers," said the traveller shrewdly.

"There, sir, I was wrong," returned Otto; "and for that I ask your pardon. You can scarce refuse it, for your own dignity, to one who is a plexus of weaknesses. Nor was the fault entirely mine. Had the papers been innocent, it would have been at most an indiscretion. Your own guilt is the sting of my offence."

Sir John regarded Otto with an approving twinkle; then he bowed, but still in silence.

"Well, sir, as you are now at your entire disposal, I have a favour to beg of your indulgence," continued the Prince. "I have to request that you will walk with me alone into the garden so soon as your convenience permits."

"From the moment that I am a free man," Sir John replied, this time with perfect courtesy, "I am wholly at your Highness's command; and if you will excuse a rather summary toilet, I will even follow you as I am."

"I thank you, sir," said Otto.

So without more delay, the Prince leading, the pair proceeded down through the echoing stairway of the tower, and out through the grating, into the ample air and sunshine of the morning, and among the terraces and flower-beds of the garden. They crossed the fish-pond, where the carp were leaping as thick as bees; they mounted, one after another, the various flights of stairs, snowed upon, as they went, with April blossoms, and marching in time to the great orchestra of birds. Nor did Otto pause till they had reached the highest terrace of the garden. Here was a gate into the park, and hard by, under a tuft of laurel, a marble garden seat. Hence they looked down on the green tops of many elm-trees, where the rooks were busy; and, beyond that, upon the

palace roof, and the yellow banner flying in the blue. "I pray you to be seated, sir," said Otto.

Sir John complied without a word; and for some seconds Otto walked to and fro before him, plunged in angry thought. The birds were all singing for a wager.

"Sir," said the Prince at length, turning towards the Englishman, "you are to me, except by the conventions of society, a perfect stranger. Of your character and wishes I am ignorant. I have never wittingly disobliged you. There is a difference in station, which I desire to waive. I would, if you still think me entitled to so much consideration—I would be regarded simply as a gentleman. Now, sir, I did wrong to glance at these papers, which I here return to you; but if curiosity be undignified, as I am free to own, falsehood is both cowardly and cruel. I opened your roll; and what did I find—what did I find about my wife? Lies!" he broke out. "They are lies! There are not, so help me God! four words of truth in your intolerable libel! You are a man; you are old, and might be the girl's father; you are a gentleman; you are a scholar, and have learned refinement; and you rake together all this vulgar scandal, and propose to print it in a public book! Such is your chivalry! But, thank God, sir, she has still a husband. You say, sir, in that paper in your hand, that I am a bad fencer; I have to request from you a lesson in the art. The park is close behind; yonder is the Pheasant House, where you will find your carriage; should I fall, you know, sir—you have written it in your paper—how little my movements are regarded; I am in the custom of disappearing: it will be one more disappearance; and long before it has awakened a remark, you may be safe across the border."

"You will observe," said Sir John, "that what you ask is impossible."

"And if I struck you?" cried the Prince, with a sudden menacing flash.

"It would be a cowardly blow," returned the Baronet,

unmoved, "for it would make no change. I cannot draw upon a reigning sovereign."

"And it is this man, to whom you dare not offer satisfaction, that you choose to insult!" cried Otto.

"Pardon me," said the traveller, "you are unjust. It is because you are a reigning sovereign that I cannot fight with you; and it is for the same reason that I have a right to criticise your action and your wife. You are in everything a public creature; you belong to the public, body and bone. You have with you the law, the muskets of the army, and the eyes of spies. We, on our side, have but one weapon—truth."

"Truth!" echoed the Prince, with a gesture.

There was another silence.

"Your Highness," said Sir John at last, "you must not expect grapes from a thistle. I am old and a cynic. Nobody cares a rush for me; and on the whole, after the present interview, I scarce know anybody that I like better than yourself. You see, I have changed my mind, and have the uncommon virtue to avow the change. I tear up this stuff before you, here in your own garden; I ask your pardon, I ask the pardon of the Princess; and I give you my word of honour as a gentleman and an old man, that when my book of travels shall appear it shall not contain so much as the name of Grünewald. And yet it was a racy chapter! But had your Highness only read about the other courts! I am a carrion crow; but it is not my fault, after all, that the world is such a nauseous kennel."

"Sir," said Otto, "is the eye not jaundiced?"

"Nay," cried the traveller, "very likely. I am one who goes sniffing; I am no poet. I believe in a better future for the world; or, at all accounts, I do most potently disbelieve in the present. Rotten eggs is the burthen of my song. But indeed, your Highness, when I meet with any merit, I do not think that I am slow to recognise it. This is a day that I shall still recall

with gratitude, for I have found a sovereign with some manly virtues; and for once—old courtier and old radical as I am—it is from the heart and quite sincerely that I can request the honour of kissing your Highness's hand?"

"Nay, sir," said Otto, "to my heart!"

And the Englishman, taken at unawares, was clasped for a moment in the Prince's arms.

"And now, sir," added Otto, "there is the Pheasant House; close behind it you will find my carriage, which I pray you to accept. God speed you to Vienna!"

"In the impetuosity of youth," replied Sir John, "your Highness has overlooked one circumstance: I am still fasting."

"Well, sir," said Otto, smiling, "you are your own master; you may go or stay. But I warn you, your friend may prove less powerful than your enemies. The Prince, indeed, is thoroughly on your side; he has all the will to help; but to whom do I speak?—you know better than I do, he is not alone in Grünewald."

"There is a deal in position," returned the traveller, gravely nodding. "Gondremark loves to temporise; his policy is below ground, and he fears all open courses; and now that I have seen you act with so much spirit, I will cheerfully risk myself on your protection. Who knows? You may be yet the better man."

"Do you indeed believe so?" cried the Prince. "You put life into my heart!"

"I will give up sketching portraits," said the Baronet. "I am a blind owl; I had misread you strangely. And yet remember this: a sprint is one thing, and to run all day another. For I still mistrust your constitution; the short nose, the hair and eyes of several complexions; no, they are diagnostic; and I must end, I see, as I began."

"I am still a singing chambermaid?" said Otto.

"Nay, your Highness, I pray you to forget what I had written," said Sir John; "I am not like Pilate; and the chapter is no more. Bury it, if you love me."

CHAPTER IV

WHILE THE PRINCE IS IN THE ANTE-ROOM . . .

GREATLY comforted by the exploits of the morning, the Prince turned towards the Princess's ante-room, bent on a more difficult enterprise. The curtains rose before him, the usher called his name, and he entered the room with an exaggeration of his usual mincing and airy dignity. There were about a score of persons waiting, principally ladies; it was one of the few societies in Grünewald where Otto knew himself to be popular; and while a maid of honour made her exit by a side door to announce his arrival to the Princess, he moved round the apartment, collecting homage and bestowing compliments with friendly grace. Had this been the sum of his duties, he had been an admirable monarch. Lady after lady was impartially honoured by his attention.

"Madam," he said to one, "how does this happen? I find you daily more adorable."

"And your Highness daily browner," replied the lady. "We began equal; oh, there I will be bold: we have both beautiful complexions. But while I study mine, your Highness tans himself."

"A perfect negro, madam; and what so fitly—being beauty's slave?" said Otto.—"Madame Grafinski, when is our next play? I have just heard that I am a bad actor."

"*O ciel!*" cried Madame Grafinski. "Who could venture? What a bear!"

"An excellent man, I can assure you," returned Otto.

"O, never! O, is it possible!" fluted the lady. "Your Highness plays like an angel."

"You must be right, madam; who could speak falsely and yet look so charming?" said the Prince. "But this gentleman, it seems, would have preferred me playing like an actor."

A sort of hum, a falsetto, feminine cooing, greeted the tiny sally; and Otto expanded like a peacock. This warm atmosphere of women and flattery and idle chatter pleased him to the marrow.

"Madame von Eisenthal, your coiffure is delicious," he remarked.

"Everyone was saying so," said one.

"If I have pleased Prince Charming?" And Madame von Eisenthal swept him a deep curtsey with a killing glance of adoration.

"It is new?" he asked. "Vienna fashion."

"Mint new," replied the lady, "for your Highness's return. I felt young this morning; it was a premonition. But why, Prince, do you ever leave us?"

"For the pleasure of the return," said Otto. "I am like a dog; I must bury my bone, and then come back to gloat upon it."

"O, a bone! Fie, what a comparison! You have brought back the manners of the wood," returned the lady.

"Madam, it is what the dog has dearest," said the Prince. "But I observe Madame von Rosen."

And Otto, leaving the group to which he had been piping, stepped towards the embrasure of a window where a lady stood.

The Countess von Rosen had hitherto been silent, and a thought depressed, but on the approach of Otto she began to brighten. She was tall, slim as a nymph, and of a very airy carriage; and her face, which was already beautiful in repose, lightened and changed, flashed into smiles, and glowed with a lovely colour at the touch

of animation. She was a good vocalist; and, even in speech, her voice commanded a great range of changes, the low notes rich with tenor quality, the upper ringing, on the brink of laughter, into music. A gem of many facets, and variable hues of fire; a woman who withheld the better portion of her beauty, and then, in a caressing second, flashed it like a weapon full on the beholder; now merely a tall figure and a sallow handsome face, with the evidences of a reckless temper; anon opening like a flower to life and colour, mirth and tenderness:—Madame von Rosen had always a dagger in reserve for the despatch of ill-assured admirers. She met Otto with the dart of tender gaiety.

"You have come to me at last, Prince Cruel," she said. "Butterfly! Well, and am I not to kiss your hand?" she added.

"Madam, it is I who must kiss yours." And Otto bowed and kissed it.

"You deny me every indulgence," she said, smiling.

"And now what news in court?" inquired the Prince. "I come to you for my gazette."

"Ditch-water!" she replied. "The world is all asleep, grown grey in slumber; I do not remember any waking movement since quite an eternity; and the last thing in the nature of a sensation was the last time my governess was allowed to box my ears. But yet I do myself and your unfortunate enchanted palace some injustice. Here is the last—O positively!" And she told him the story from behind her fan, with many glances, many cunning strokes of the narrator's art. The others had drawn away, for it was understood that Madame von Rosen was in favour with the Prince. None the less, however, did the Countess lower her voice at times to within a semitone of whispering; and the pair leaned together over the narrative.

"Do you know," said Otto, laughing, "you are the only entertaining woman on this earth!"

" O, you have found out so much," she cried.

" Yes, madam, I grow wiser with advancing years," he returned.

" Years ! " she repeated. " Do you name the traitors ? I do not believe in years ; the calendar is a delusion."

" You must be right, madam," replied the Prince. " For six years that we have been good friends, I have observed you to grow younger."

" Flatterer," cried she, and then, with a change, " But why should I say so," she added, " when I protest I think the same ? A week ago I had a council with my father director, the glass ; and the glass replied, ' Not yet ! ' I confess my face in this way once a month. O ! a very solemn moment. Do you know what I shall do when the mirror answers, ' Now ' ? "

" I cannot guess," said he.

" No more can I," returned the Countess. " There is such a choice ! Suicide, gambling, a nunnery, a volume of memoirs, or politics—the last, I am afraid."

" It is a dull trade," said Otto.

" Nay," she replied, " it is a trade I rather like. It is, after all, first cousin to gossip, which no one can deny to be amusing. For instance, if I were to tell you that the Princess and the Baron rode out together daily to inspect the cannon, it is either a piece of politics or scandal, as I turn my phrase. I am the alchemist that makes the transmutation. They have been everywhere together since you left," she continued, brightening as she saw Otto darken ; " that is a poor snippet of malicious gossip—and they were everywhere cheered—and with that addition all becomes political intelligence."

" Let us change the subject," said Otto.

" I was about to propose it," she replied, " or rather to pursue the politics. Do you know ? this war is popular —popular to the length of cheering Princess Seraphina."

" All things, madam, are possible," said the Prince ; " and this among others, that we may be going into war,

but I give you my word of honour I do not know with whom."

"And you put up with it?" she cried. "I have no pretensions to morality; and I confess I have always abominated the lamb, and nourished a romantic feeling for the wolf. O, be done with lambiness! Let us see there is a prince, for I am weary of the distaff."

"Madam," said Otto, "I thought you were of that faction."

"I should be of yours, *mon Prince*, if you had one," she retorted. "Is it true that you have no ambition? There was a man once in England whom they call the kingmaker. Do you know," she added, "I fancy I could make a prince?"

"Some day, madam," said Otto, "I may ask you to help make a farmer."

"Is that a riddle?" asked the Countess.

"It is," replied the Prince, "and a very good one too."

"Tit for tat. I will ask you another," she returned. "Where is Gondremark?"

"The Prime Minister? In the prime-ministry, no doubt," said Otto.

"Precisely," said the Countess; and she pointed with her fan to the door of the Princess's apartments. "You and I, *mon Prince*, are in the ante-room. You think me unkind," she added. "Try me and you will see. Set me a task, put me a question; there is no enormity I am not capable of doing to oblige you, and no secret that I am not ready to betray."

"Nay, madam, but I respect my friend too much," he answered, kissing her hand. "I would rather remain ignorant of all. We fraternise like foemen soldiers at the outposts, but let each be true to his own army."

"Ah," she cried, "if all men were generous like you, it would be worth while to be a woman!" Yet, judging by her looks, his generosity, if anything, had disappointed

her; she seemed to seek a remedy, and, having found it, brightened once more. "And now," she said, "may I dismiss my sovereign? This is rebellion and a *cas pendable;* but what am I to do? My bear is jealous!"

"Madam, enough!" cried Otto. "Ahasuerus reaches you the sceptre; more, he will obey you in all points. I should have been a dog to come to whistling."

And so the Prince departed, and fluttered round Grafinski and von Eisenthal. But the Countess knew the use of her offensive weapons, and had left a pleasant arrow in the Prince's heart. That Gondremark was jealous—here was an agreeable revenge! And Madame von Rosen, as the occasion of the jealousy, appeared to him in a new light.

CHAPTER V

. . . GONDREMARK IS IN MY LADY'S CHAMBER

The Countess von Rosen spoke the truth. The great Prime Minister of Grünewald was already closeted with Seraphina. The toilet was over; and the Princess, tastefully arrayed, sat face to face with a tall mirror. Sir John's description was unkindly true, true in terms and yet a libel, a misogynistic masterpiece. Her forehead was perhaps too high, but it became her; her figure somewhat stooped, but every detail was formed and finished like a gem; her hand, her foot, her ear, the set of her comely head, were all dainty and accordant; if she was not beautiful, she was vivid, changeful, coloured, and pretty with a thousand various prettinesses; and her eyes, if they indeed rolled too consciously, yet rolled to purpose. They were her most attractive feature, yet they continually bore eloquent false witness to her thoughts; for while she herself, in the depths of her immature, unsoftened heart, was given altogether to manlike ambition and the desire of power, the eyes were by turns bold, inviting, fiery, melting, and artful, like the eyes of a rapacious siren. And artful, in a sense, she was. Chafing that she was not a man, and could not shine by action, she had conceived a woman's part, of answerable domination; she sought to subjugate for by-ends, to rain influence and be fancy free; and, while she loved not man, loved to see man obey her. It is a common girl's ambition. Such was perhaps that lady of the glove, who sent her lover to the lions. But the snare is laid alike for male and female, and the world most artfully contrived.

Near her, in a low chair, Gondremark had arranged his limbs into a cat-like attitude, high-shouldered, stooping, and submiss. The formidable blue jowl of the man, and the dull bilious eye, set perhaps a higher value on his evident desire to please. His face was marked by capacity, temper, and a kind of bold, piratical dishonesty which it would be calumnious to call deceit. His manners, as he smiled upon the Princess, were over-fine, yet hardly elegant.

"Possibly," said the Baron, "I should now proceed to take my leave. I must not keep my sovereign in the ante-room. Let us come at once to a decision."

"It cannot, cannot be put off?" she asked.

"It is impossible," answered Gondremark. "Your Highness sees it for herself. In the earlier stages we might imitate the serpent; but for the ultimatum, there is no choice but to be bold like lions. Had the Prince chosen to remain away, it had been better; but we have gone too far forward to delay."

"What can have brought him?" she cried. "To-day of all days?"

"The marplot, madam, has the instinct of his nature," returned Gondremark. "But you exaggerate the peril. Think, madam, how far we have prospered, and against what odds! Shall a Featherhead?—but no!" And he blew upon his fingers lightly with a laugh.

"Featherhead," she replied, "is still the Prince of Grünewald."

"On your sufferance only, and so long as you shall please to be indulgent," said the Baron. "There are rights of nature; power to the powerful is the law. If he shall think to cross your destiny—well, you have heard of the brazen and the earthen pot."

"Do you call me pot? You are ungallant, Baron," laughed the Princess.

"Before we are done with your glory, I shall have called you by many different titles," he replied.

The girl flushed with pleasure. "But Frédéric is still the Prince, *monsieur le flatteur*," she said. "You do not propose a revolution?—you of all men?"

"Dear madam, when it is already made!" he cried. "The Prince reigns indeed in the almanac; but my Princess reigns and rules." And he looked at her with a fond admiration that made the heart of Seraphina swell. Looking on her huge slave, she drank the intoxicating joys of power. Meanwhile he continued, with that sort of massive archness that so ill became him, "She has but one fault; there is but one danger in the great career that I foresee for her. May I name it? may I be so irreverent? It is in herself—her heart is soft."

"Her courage is faint, Baron," said the Princess. "Suppose we have judged ill, suppose we were defeated?"

"Defeated, madam?" returned the Baron, with a touch of ill-humour. "Is the dog defeated by the hare? Our troops are all cantoned along the frontier; in five hours the vanguard of five thousand bayonets shall be hammering on the gates of Brandenau; and in all Gerolstein there are not fifteen hundred men who can manœuvre. It is as simple as a sum. There can be no resistance."

"It is no great exploit," she said. "Is that what you call glory? It is like beating a child."

"The courage, madam, is diplomatic," he replied. "We take a grave step; we fix the eyes of Europe, for the first time, on Grünewald; and in the negotiations of the next three months, mark me, we stand or fall. It is there, madam, that I shall have to depend upon your counsels," he added, almost gloomily. "If I had not seen you at work, if I did not know the fertility of your mind, I own I should tremble for the consequence. But it is in this field that men must recognise their inability. All the great negotiators, when they have not been women, have had women at their elbows. Madame de Pompadour was ill served; she had not found her Gondremark; but what a mighty politician! Catherine de' Medici, too,

what justice of sight, what readiness of means, what elasticity against defeat! But alas! madam, her Featherheads were her own children; and she had that one touch of vulgarity, that one trait of the good-wife, that she suffered family ties and affections to confine her liberty."

These singular views of history, strictly *ad usum Seraphinæ*, did not weave their usual soothing spell over the Princess. It was plain that she had taken a momentary distaste to her own resolutions; for she continued to oppose her counsellor, looking upon him out of half-closed eyes and with the shadow of a sneer upon her lips. "What boys men are!" she said; "what lovers of big words! Courage, indeed! If you had to scour pans, Herr von Gondremark, you would call it, I suppose, Domestic Courage?"

"I would, madam," said the Baron stoutly, "if I scoured them well. I would put a good name upon a virtue; you will not overdo it; they are not so enchanting in themselves."

"Well, but let me see," she said. "I wish to understand your courage. Why we asked leave, like children! Our grannie in Berlin, our uncle in Vienna, the whole family, have patted us on the head and sent us forward. Courage? I wonder when I hear you!"

"My Princess is unlike herself," returned the Baron. "She has forgotten where the peril lies. True, we have received encouragement on every hand; but my Princess knows too well on what untenable conditions; and she knows besides how, in the publicity of the diet, these whispered conferences are forgotten and disowned. The danger is very real"—he raged inwardly at having to blow the very coal he had been quenching—"none the less real in that it is not precisely military, but for that reason the easier to be faced. Had we to count upon your troops, although I share your Highness's expectations of the conduct of Alvenau, we cannot forget that he has not been proved in chief command. But where

negotiation is concerned, the conduct lies with us; and with your help, I laugh at danger."

"It may be so," said Seraphina, sighing. "It is elsewhere that I see danger. The people, these abominable people—suppose they should instantly rebel? What a figure we should make in the eyes of Europe to have undertaken an invasion while my own throne was tottering to its fall!"

"Nay, madam," said Gondremark, smiling, "here you are beneath yourself. What is it that feeds their discontent? What but the taxes? Once we have seized Gerolstein, the taxes are remitted, the sons return covered with renown, the houses are adorned with pillage, each tastes his little share of military glory, and behold us once again a happy family! 'Ay,' they will say in each other's long ears, 'the Princess knew what she was about; she was in the right of it; she has a head upon her shoulders; and here we are, you see, better off than before.' But why should I say all this? It is what my Princess pointed out to me herself; it was by these reasons that she converted me to this adventure."

"I think, Herr von Gondremark," said Seraphina, somewhat tartly, "you often attribute your own sagacity to your Princess."

For a second Gondremark staggered under the shrewdness of the attack; the next, he had perfectly recovered. "Do I?" he said. "It is very possible. I have observed a similar tendency in your Highness."

It was so openly spoken, and appeared so just, that Seraphina breathed again. Her vanity had been alarmed, and the greatness of the relief improved her spirits. "Well," she said, "all this is little to the purpose. We are keeping Frédéric without, and I am still ignorant of our line of battle. Come, co-admiral, let us consult. . . . How am I to receive him now? And what are we to do if he should appear at the council?"

"Now," he answered. "I shall leave him to my

Princess for just now! I have seen her at work. Send him off to his theatricals! But in all gentleness," he added. "Would it, for instance, would it displease my sovereign to affect a headache?"

"Never!" said she. "The woman who can manage, like the man who can fight, must never shrink from an encounter. The knight must not disgrace his weapons."

"Then let me pray my *belle dame sans merci*," he returned, "to affect the only virtue that she lacks. Be pitiful to the poor young man; affect an interest in his hunting; be weary of politics; find in his society, as it were, a grateful repose from dry considerations. Does my Princess authorise the line of battle?"

"Well, that is a trifle," answered Seraphina. "The council—there is the point."

"The council?" cried Gondremark. "Permit me, madam." And he rose and proceeded to flutter about the room, counterfeiting Otto both in voice and gesture not unhappily. "What is there to-day, Herr von Gondremark? Ah, Herr Cancellarius, a new wig! You cannot deceive me; I know every wig in Grünewald; I have the sovereign's eye. What are these papers about? O, I see. O, certainly. Surely, surely. I wager none of you remarked that wig. By all means. I know nothing about that. Dear me, are there as many as all that? Well, you can sign them; you have the procuration. You see, Herr Cancellarius, I knew your wig. And so," concluded Gondremark, resuming his own voice, "our sovereign, by the particular grace of God, enlightens and supports his privy councillors."

But when the Baron turned to Seraphina for approval he found her frozen. "You are pleased to be witty, Herr von Gondremark," she said, "and have perhaps forgotten where you are. But these rehearsals are apt to be misleading. Your master, the Prince of Grünewald, is sometimes more exacting."

Gondremark cursed her in his soul. Of all injured

vanities, that of the reproved buffoon is the most savage; and when grave issues are involved, these petty stabs become unbearable. But Gondremark was a man of iron; he showed nothing; he did not even, like the common trickster, retreat because he had presumed, but held to his point bravely. "Madam," he said, "if, as you say, he prove exacting, we must take the bull by the horns."

"We shall see," she said, and she arranged her skirt like one about to rise. Temper, scorn, disgust, all the more acrid feelings, became her like jewels; and she now looked her best.

"Pray God they quarrel," thought Gondremark. "The damned minx may fail me yet, unless they quarrel. It is time to let him in. Zz—fight, dogs!" Consequent on these reflections, he bent a stiff knee, and chivalrously kissed the Princess's hand. "My Princess," he said, "must now dismiss her servant. I have much to arrange against the hour of council."

"Go," she said, and rose.

And as Gondremark tripped out of a private door, she touched a bell, and gave the order to admit the Prince.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRINCE DELIVERS A LECTURE ON MARRIAGE, WITH PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATIONS OF DIVORCE

With what a world of excellent intentions Otto entered his wife's cabinet! how fatherly, how tender! how morally affecting were the words he had prepared! Nor was Seraphina unamiably inclined. Her usual fear of Otto as a marplot in her great designs was now swallowed up in a passing distrust of the designs themselves. For Gondremark, besides, she had conceived an angry horror. In her heart she did not like the Baron. Behind his impudent servility, behind the devotion which, with indelicate delicacy, he still forced on her attention, she divined the grossness of his nature. So a man may be proud of having tamed a bear, and yet sicken at his captive's odour. And above all, she had certain jealous intimations that the man was false and the deception double. True, she falsely trifled with his love; but he, perhaps, was only trifling with her vanity. The insolence of his late mimicry, and the odium of her own position as she sat and watched it, lay besides like a load upon her conscience. She met Otto almost with a sense of guilt, and yet she welcomed him as a deliverer from ugly things.

But the wheels of an interview are at the mercy of a thousand ruts; and even at Otto's entrance, the first jolt occurred. Gondremark, he saw, was gone; but there was the chair drawn close for consultation; and it pained him not only that this man had been received, but that he should depart with such an air of secrecy. Struggling with this twinge, it was somewhat sharply

that he dismissed the attendant who had brought him in.

"You make yourself at home, *chez moi*," she said, a little ruffled both by his tone of command and by the glance he had thrown upon the chair.

"Madam," replied Otto, "I am here so seldom that I have almost the rights of a stranger."

"You choose your own associates, Frédéric," she said.

"I am here to speak of it," he returned. "It is now four years since we were married; and these four years, Seraphina, have not perhaps been happy either for you or for me. I am well aware I was unsuitable to be your husband. I was not young, I had no ambition, I was a trifler; and you despised me, I dare not say unjustly. But to do justice on both sides, you must bear in mind how I have acted. When I found it amused you to play the part of Princess on this little stage, did I not immediately resign to you my box of toys, this Grünewald? And when I found I was distasteful as a husband, could any husband have been less intrusive? You will tell me that I have no feelings, no preference, and thus no credit; that I go before the wind; that all this was in my character. And indeed, one thing is true,—that it is easy, too easy, to leave things undone. But, Seraphina, I begin to learn it is not always wise. If I were too old and too uncongenial for your husband, I should still have remembered that I was the Prince of that country to which you came, a visitor and a child. In that relation also there were duties, and these duties I have not performed."

To claim the advantage of superior age is to give sure offence. "Duty!" laughed Seraphina, "and on your lips, Frédéric! You make me laugh. What fancy is this? Go, flirt with the maids and be a prince in Dresden china, as you look. Enjoy yourself, *mon enfant*, and leave duty and the state to us."

The plural grated on the Prince. "I have enjoyed myself too much," he said, "since enjoyment is the word.

And yet there were much to say upon the other side. You must suppose me desperately fond of hunting. But indeed there were days when I found a great deal of interest in what it was courtesy to call my government. And I have always had some claim to taste; I could tell live happiness from dull routine; and between hunting, and the throne of Austria, and your society, my choice had never wavered, had the choice been mine. You were a girl, a bud, when you were given me——"

"Heavens!" she cried, "is this to be a love-scene?"

"I am never ridiculous," he said; "it is my only merit; and you may be certain this shall be a scene of marriage *à la mode*. But when I remember the beginning, it is bare courtesy to speak in sorrow. Be just, madam: you would think me strangely uncivil to recall these days without the decency of a regret. Be yet a little juster, and own, if only in complaisance, that you yourself regret that past."

"I have nothing to regret," said the Princess. "You surprise me. I thought you were so happy."

"Happy and happy, there are so many hundred ways," said Otto. "A man may be happy in revolt; he may be happy in sleep; wine, change, and travel make him happy; virtue, they say, will do the like—I have not tried; and they say also that in old, quiet, and habitual marriages there is yet another happiness. Happy, yes; I am happy if you like; but I will tell you frankly, I was happier when I brought you home."

"Well," said the Princess, not without constraint, "it seems you changed your mind."

"Not I," returned Otto, "I never changed. Do you remember, Seraphina, on our way home, when you saw the roses in the lane, and I got out and plucked them? It was a narrow lane between great trees; the sunset at the end was all gold, and the rooks were flying overhead. There were nine, nine red roses; you gave me a kiss for each, and I told myself that every rose and every

kiss should stand for a year of love. Well, in eighteen months there was an end. But do you fancy, Seraphina, that my heart has altered ? "

" I am sure I cannot tell," she said, like an automaton.

" It has not," the Prince continued. " There is nothing ridiculous, even from a husband, in a love that owns itself unhappy and that asks no more. I built on sand ; pardon me, I do not breathe a reproach—I built, I suppose, upon my own infirmities ; but I put my heart in the building, and it still lies among the ruins."

" How very poetical ! " she said, with a little choking laugh, unknown relentings, unfamiliar softnesses, moving within her. " What would you be at ? " she added, hardening her voice.

" I would be at this," he answered ; " and hard it is to say. I would be at this :—Seraphina, I am your husband, after all, and a poor fool that loves you. Understand," he cried almost fiercely, " I am no suppliant husband ; what your love refuses I would scorn to receive from your pity. I do not ask, I would not take it. And for jealousy, what ground have I ? A dog-in-the-manger jealousy is a thing the dogs may laugh at. But at least, in the world's eye, I am still your husband ; and I ask you if you treat me fairly ? I keep to myself, I leave you free, I have given you in everything your will. What do you in return ? I find, Seraphina, that you have been too thoughtless. But between persons such as we are, in our conspicuous station, particular care and a particular courtesy are owing. Scandal is perhaps not easy to avoid ; but it is hard to bear."

" Scandal ! " she cried, with a deep breath. " Scandal ! It is for this you have been driving ! "

" I have tried to tell you how I feel," he replied. " I have told you that I love you—love you in vain—a bitter thing for a husband ; I have laid myself open that I might speak without offence. And now that I have begun, I will go on and finish."

"I demand it," she said. "What is this about?"

Otto flushed crimson. "I have to say what I would fain not," he answered. "I counsel you to see less of Gondremark."

"Of Gondremark? And why?" she asked.

"Your intimacy is the ground of scandal, madam," said Otto, firmly enough—"of a scandal that is agony to me, and would be crushing to your parents if they knew it."

"You are the first to bring me word of it," said she. "I thank you."

"You have perhaps cause," he replied. "Perhaps I am the only one among your friends——"

"O, leave my friends alone," she interrupted. "My friends are of a different stamp. You have come to me here and made a parade of sentiment. When have I last seen you? I have governed your kingdom for you in the meantime, and there I got no help. At last, when I am weary with a man's work, and you are weary of your playthings, you return to make me a scene of conjugal reproaches—the grocer and his wife! The positions are too much reversed; and you should understand, at least, that I cannot at the same time do your work of government and behave myself like a little girl. Scandal is the atmosphere in which we live, we princes; it is what a prince should know. You play an odious part. Do you believe this rumour?"

"Madam, should I be here?" said Otto.

"It is what I want to know!" she cried, the tempest of her scorn increasing. "Suppose you did—I say, suppose you did believe it?"

"I should make it my business to suppose the contrary," he answered.

"I thought so. O, you are made of baseness!" said she.

"Madam," he cried, roused at last, "enough of this. You wilfully misunderstand my attitude; you outwear

my patience. In the name of your parents, in my own name, I summon you to be more circumspect."

"Is this a request, *monsieur mon mari?*" she demanded.

"Madam, if I chose, I might command," said Otto.

"You might, sir, as the law stands, make me prisoner," returned Seraphina. "Short of that you will gain nothing."

"You will continue as before?" he asked.

"Precisely as before," said she. "As soon as this comedy is over, I shall request the Freiherr von Gondremark to visit me. Do you understand?" she added, rising. "For my part, I have done."

"I will then ask the favour of your hand, madam," said Otto, palpitating in every pulse with anger. "I have to request that you will visit in my society another part of my poor house. And reassure yourself—it will not take long—and it is the last obligation that you shall have the chance to lay me under."

"The last?" she cried. "Most joyfully!"

She offered her hand, and he took it; on each side with an elaborate affectation, each inwardly incandescent. He led her out by the private door, following where Gondremark had passed; they threaded a corridor or two, little frequented, looking on a court, until they came at last into the Prince's suite. The first room was an armoury, hung all about with the weapons of various countries, and looking forth on the front terrace.

"Have you brought me here to slay me?" she inquired.

"I have brought you, madam, only to pass on," replied Otto.

Next they came to a library, where an old chamberlain sat half asleep. He rose and bowed before the princely couple, asking for orders.

"You will attend us here," said Otto.

The next stage was a gallery of pictures, where

Seraphina's portrait hung conspicuous, dressed for the chase, red roses in her hair, as Otto, in the first months of marriage, had directed. He pointed to it without a word; she raised her eyebrows in silence; and they passed still forward into a matted corridor where four doors opened. One led to Otto's bedroom; one was the private door to Seraphina's. And here, for the first time, Otto left her hand, and, stepping forward, shot the bolt.

"It is long, madam," said he, "since it was bolted on the other side."

"One was effectual," returned the Princess. "Is this all?"

"Shall I reconduct you?" he asked, bowing.

"I should prefer," she asked, in ringing tones, "the conduct of the Freiherr von Gondremark."

Otto summoned the chamberlain. "If the Freiherr von Gondremark is in the palace," he said, "bid him attend the Princess here." And when the official had departed, "Can I do more to serve you, madam?" the Prince asked.

"Thank you, no. I have been much amused," she answered.

"I have now," continued Otto, "given you your liberty complete. This has been for you a miserable marriage."

"Miserable!" said she.

"It has been made light to you; it shall be lighter still," continued the Prince. "But one thing, madam, you must still continue to bear—my father's name, which is now yours. I leave it in your hands. Let me see you, since you will have no advice of mine, apply the more attention of your own to bear it worthily."

"Herr von Gondremark is long in coming," she remarked.

"O Seraphina, Seraphina!" he cried. And that was the end of their interview.

She tripped to a window and looked out; and a little

after, the chamberlain announced the Freiherr von Gondremark, who entered with something of a wild eye and changed complexion, confounded, as he was, at this unusual summons. The Princess faced round from the window with a pearly smile ; nothing but her heightened colour spoke of discomposure. Otto was pale, but he was otherwise master of himself.

" Herr von Gondremark," said he, " oblige me so far : reconduct the Princess to her own apartment."

The Baron, still all at sea, offered his hand, which was smilingly accepted, and the pair sailed forth through the picture-gallery.

As soon as they were gone, and Otto knew the length and breadth of his miscarriage, and how he had done the contrary of all that he intended, he stood stupefied. A fiasco so complete and sweeping was laughable, even to himself ; and he laughed aloud in his wrath. Upon this mood there followed the sharpest violence of remorse ; and to that again, as he recalled his provocation, anger succeeded afresh. So he was tossed in spirit ; now bewailing his inconsequence and lack of temper, now flaming up in white-hot indignation and a noble pity for himself.

He paced his apartment like a leopard. There was danger in Otto, for a flash. Like a pistol, he could kill at one moment, and the next he might be kicked aside. But just then, as he walked the long floors in his alternate humours, tearing his handkerchief between his hands, he was strung to his top note, every nerve attent. The pistol, you might say, was charged. And when jealousy from time to time fetched him a lash across the tenderest of his feeling, and sent a string of her fire-pictures glancing before his mind's eye, the contraction of his face was even dangerous. He disregarded jealousy's inventions, yet they stung. In this height of anger, he still preserved his faith in Seraphina's innocence ; but the thought of her possible misconduct was the bitterest ingredient in his pot of sorrow.

There came a knock at the door, and the chamberlain brought him a note. He took it and ground it in his hand, continuing his march, continuing his bewildered thoughts; and some minutes had gone by before the circumstance came clearly to his mind. Then he paused and opened it. It was a pencil scratch from Gotthold, thus conceived:

> "The council is privately summoned at once.
>
> "G. v. H."

If the council was thus called before the hour, and that privately, it was plain they feared his interference. Feared: here was a sweet thought. Gotthold, too—Gotthold, who had always used and regarded him as a mere peasant lad, had now been at the pains to warn him; Gotthold looked for something at his hands. Well, none should be disappointed; the Prince, too long beshadowed by the uxorious lover, should now return and shine. He summoned his valet, repaired the disorder of his appearance with elaborate care; and then, curled and scented and adorned, Prince Charming in every line, but with a twitching nostril, he set forth unattended for the council.

CHAPTER VII

THE PRINCE DISSOLVES THE COUNCIL

It was as Gotthold wrote. The liberation of Sir John, Greisengesang's uneasy narrative, last of all, the scene between Seraphina and the Prince, had decided the conspirators to take a step of bold timidity. There had been a period of bustle, liveried messengers speeding here and there with notes; and at half-past ten in the morning, about an hour before its usual hour, the council of Grünewald sat around the board.

It was not a large body. At the instance of Gondremark, it had undergone a strict purgation, and was now composed exclusively of tools. Three secretaries sat at a side-table. Seraphina took the head; on her right was the Baron, on her left Greisengesang; below these Grafinski the treasurer, Count Eisenthal, a couple of non-combatants, and, to the surprise of all, Gotthold. He had been named a privy councillor by Otto, merely that he might profit by the salary; and as he was never known to attend a meeting, it had occurred to nobody to cancel his appointment. His present appearance was the more ominous, coming when it did. Gondremark scowled upon him; and the non-combatant on his right, intercepting this black look, edged away from one who was so clearly out of favour.

"The hour presses, your Highness," said the Baron; "may we proceed to business?"

"At once," replied Seraphina.

"Your Highness will pardon me," said Gotthold;

" but you are still, perhaps, unacquainted with the fact that Prince Otto has returned."

" The Prince will not attend the council," replied Seraphina, with a momentary blush.—" The despatches, Herr Cancellarius ? There is one for Gerolstein ? "

A secretary brought a paper.

" Here, madam," said Greisengesang. " Shall I read it ? "

" We are all familiar with its terms," replied Gondremark. " Your Highness approves ? "

" Unhesitatingly," said Seraphina.

" It may then be held as read," concluded the Baron. " Will your Highness sign ? "

The Princess did so ; Gondremark, Eisenthal, and one of the non-combatants followed suit ; and the paper was then passed across the table to the librarian. He proceeded leisurely to read.

" We have no time to spare, Herr Doctor," cried the Baron brutally. " If you do not choose to sign on the authority of your sovereign, pass it on. Or you may leave the table," he added, his temper ripping out.

" I decline your invitation, Herr von Gondremark ; and my sovereign, as I continue to observe with regret, is still absent from the board," replied the Doctor calmly ; and he resumed the perusal of the paper, the rest chafing and exchanging glances. " Madam and gentlemen," he said at last, " what I hold in my hand is simply a declaration of war."

" Simply," said Seraphina, flashing defiance.

" The sovereign of this country is under the same roof with us," continued Gotthold, " and I insist he shall be summoned. It is needless to adduce my reasons ; you are all ashamed at heart of this projected treachery."

The council waved like a sea. There were various outcries.

" You insult the Princess," thundered Gondremark.

" I maintain my protest," replied Gotthold.

At the height of this confusion the door was thrown open; an usher announced, "Gentlemen, the Prince!" and Otto, with his most excellent bearing, entered the apartment. It was like oil upon the troubled waters; every one settled instantly into his place, and Griesengesang, to give himself a countenance, became absorbed in the arrangement of his papers; but in their eagerness to dissemble one and all neglected to rise.

"Gentlemen," said the Prince, pausing.

They all got to their feet in a moment; and this reproof still further demoralised the weaker brethren.

The Prince moved slowly towards the lower end of the table; then he paused again, and, fixing his eye on Greisengesang, "How comes it, Herr Cancellarius," he said, "that I have received no notice of the change of hour?"

"Your Highness," replied the Chancellor, "her Highness the Princess . . ." and there paused.

"I understood," said Seraphina, taking him up, "that you did not purpose to be present."

Their eyes met for a second, and Seraphina's fell; but her anger only burned the brighter for that private shame.

"And now, gentlemen," said Otto, taking his chair, "I pray you to be seated. I have been absent; there are doubtless some arrears; but ere we proceed to business, Herr Grafinski, you will direct four thousand crowns to be sent to me at once. Make a note, if you please," he added, as the treasurer still stared in wonder.

"Four thousand crowns?" asked Seraphina. "Pray for what?"

"Madam," returned Otto, smiling, "for my own purposes."

Gondremark spurred up Grafinski underneath the table.

"If your Highness will indicate the destination . . ." began the puppet.

"You are not here, sir, to interrogate your Prince," said Otto.

Grafinski looked for help to his commander; and Gondremark came to his aid, in suave and measured tones.

"Your Highness may reasonably be surprised," he said; "and Herr Grafinski, although I am convinced he is clear of the intention of offending, would have perhaps done better to begin with an explanation. The resources of the state are at the present moment entirely swallowed up, or, as we hope to prove, wisely invested. In a month from now, I do not question we shall be able to meet any command your Highness may lay upon us; but at this hour I fear that, even in so small a matter, he must prepare himself for disappointment. Our zeal is no less, although our power may be inadequate."

"How much, Herr Grafinski, have we in the treasury?" asked Otto.

"Your Highness," protested the treasurer, "we have immediate need of every crown."

"I think, sir, you evade me," flashed the Prince; and then, turning to the side-table, "Mr. Secretary," he added, "bring me, if you please, the treasury docket."

Herr Grafinski became deadly pale; the Chancellor, expecting his own turn, was probably engaged in prayer; Gondremark was watching like a ponderous cat. Gotthold, on his part, looked on with wonder at his cousin; he was certainly showing spirit, but what, in such a time of gravity, was all this talk of money? and why should he waste his strength upon a personal issue?

"I find," said Otto, with his finger on the docket, "that we have 20,000 crowns in case."

"That is exact, your Highness," replied the Baron. "But our liabilities, all of which are happily not liquid, amount to a far larger sum; and at the present point of time it would be morally impossible to divert a single florin. Essentially, the case is empty. We have, already presented, a large note for material of war."

"Material of war?" exclaimed Otto, with an excellent

assumption of surprise. "But if my memory serves me right, we settled these accounts in January."

"There have been further orders," the Baron explained. "A new park of artillery has been completed; five hundred stand of arms, seven hundred baggage mules—the details are in a special memorandum.—Mr. Secretary Holtz, the memorandum, if you please."

"One would think, gentlemen, that we were going to war," said Otto.

"We are," said Seraphina.

"War!" cried the Prince. "And, gentlemen, with whom? The peace of Grünewald has endured for centuries. What aggression, what insult, have we suffered?"

"Here, your Highness," said Gotthold, "is the ultimatum. It was in the very article of signature, when your Highness so opportunely entered."

Otto laid the paper before him; as he read, his fingers played tattoo upon the table. "Was it proposed," he inquired, "to send this paper forth without a knowledge of my pleasure?"

One of the non-combatants, eager to trim, volunteered an answer. "The Herr Doctor von Hohenstockwitz had just entered his dissent," he added.

"Give me the rest of this correspondence," said the Prince. It was handed to him, and he read it patiently from end to end, while the councillors sat foolishly enough looking before them on the table. The secretaries, in the background, were exchanging glances of delight; a row at the council was for them a rare and welcome feature.

"Gentlemen," said Otto, when he had finished, "I have read with pain. This claim upon Obermünsterol is palpably unjust; it has not a tincture, not a show, of justice. There is not in all this ground enough for after-dinner talk, and you propose to force it as a *casus belli*."

"Certainly, your Highness," returned Gondremark, too wise to defend the indefensible, "the claim on Obermünsterol is simply a pretext."

"It is well," said the Prince. "Herr Cancellarius, take your pen. 'The council,'" he began to dictate—"I withhold all notice of my intervention," he said, in parenthesis, and addressing himself more directly to his wife; "and I say nothing of the strange suppression by which this business has been smuggled past my knowledge. I am content to be in time—'The council,'" he resumed, "'on a further examination of the facts, and enlightened by the note in the last despatch from Gerolstein, have the pleasure to announce that they are entirely at one, both as to fact and sentiment, with the Grand-Ducal Court of Gerolstein.' You have it? Upon these lines, sir, you will draw up the despatch."

"If your Highness will allow me," said the Baron, "your Highness is so imperfectly acquainted with the internal history of this correspondence, that any interference will be merely hurtful. Such a paper as your Highness proposes would be to stultify the whole previous policy of Grünewald."

"The policy of Grünewald!" cried the Prince. "One would suppose you had no sense of humour! Would you fish in a coffee cup?"

"With deference, your Highness," returned the Baron, "even in a coffee cup there may be poison. The purpose of this war is not simply territorial enlargement; still less is it a war of glory; for, as your Highness indicates, the state of Grünewald is too small to be ambitious. But the body politic is seriously diseased; republicanism, socialism, many disintegrating ideas are abroad; circle within circle, a really formidable organisation has grown up about your Highness's throne."

"I have heard of it, Herr von Gondremark," put in the Prince; "but I have reason to be aware that yours is the more authoritative information."

"I am honoured by this expression of my Prince's confidence," returned Gondremark, unabashed. "It is, therefore, with a single eye to these disorders that our

present external policy has been shaped. Something was required to divert public attention, to employ the idle, to popularise your Highness's rule, and, if it were possible, to enable him to reduce the taxes at a blow, and to a notable amount. The proposed expedition—for it cannot without hyperbole be called a war—seemed to the council to combine the various characters required; a marked improvement in the public sentiment has followed even upon our preparations; and I cannot doubt that when success shall follow, the effect will surpass even our boldest hopes."

"You are very adroit, Herr von Gondremark," said Otto. "You fill me with admiration. I had not heretofore done justice to your qualities."

Seraphina looked up with joy, supposing Otto conquered; but Gondremark still waited, armed at every point; he knew how very stubborn is the revolt of a weak character.

"And the territorial army scheme, to which I was persuaded to consent—was it secretly directed to the same end?" the Prince asked.

"I still believe the effect to have been good," replied the Baron; "discipline and mounting guard are excellent sedatives. But I will avow to your Highness, I was unaware, at the date of that decree, of the magnitude of the revolutionary movement; nor did any of us, I think, imagine that such a territorial army was a part of the republican proposals."

"It was?" asked Otto. "Strange! Upon what fancied grounds?"

"The grounds were indeed fanciful," returned the Baron. "It was conceived among the leaders that a territorial army, drawn from and returning to the people, would, in the event of any popular uprising, prove lukewarm or unfaithful to the throne."

"I see," said the Prince. "I begin to understand."

"His Highness begins to understand?" repeated

Gondremark, with the sweetest politeness. "May I beg of him to complete the phrase?"

"The history of the revolution," replied Otto drily. "And now," he added, "what do you conclude?"

"I conclude, your Highness, with a simple reflection," said the Baron, accepting the stab without a quiver, "the war is popular; were the rumour contradicted to-morrow, a considerable disappointment would be felt in many classes; and in the present tension of spirits, the most lukewarm sentiment may be enough to precipitate events. There lies the danger. The revolution hangs imminent; we sit, at this council board, below the sword of Damocles."

"We must then lay our heads together," said the Prince, "and devise some honourable means of safety."

Up to this moment, since the first note of opposition fell from the librarian, Seraphina had uttered about twenty words. With a somewhat heightened colour, her eyes generally lowered, her foot sometimes nervously tapping on the floor, she had kept her own counsel and commanded her anger like a hero. But at this stage of the engagement she lost control of her impatience.

"Means!" she cried. "They have been found and prepared before you knew the need for them. Sign the despatch, and let us be done with this delay."

"Madam, I said 'honourable,'" returned Otto, bowing. "This war is, in my eyes, and by Herr von Gondremark's account, an inadmissible expedient. If we have misgoverned here in Grünewald, are the people of Gerolstein to bleed and pay for our misdoings? Never, madam; not while I live. But I attach so much importance to all that I have heard to-day for the first time—and why only to-day I do not even stop to ask—that I am eager to find some plan that I can follow with credit to myself."

"And should you fail?" she asked.

"Should I fail, I will then meet the blow half-way," replied the Prince. "On the first open discontent, I shall

convoke the States, and, when it pleases them to bid me, abdicate."

Seraphina laughed angrily. "This is the man for whom we have been labouring!" she cried. "We tell him of change; he will devise the means, he says; and his device is abdication? Sir, have you no shame to come here at the eleventh hour among those who have borne the heat and burthen of the day? Do you not wonder at yourself? I, sir, was here in my place, striving to uphold your dignity alone. I took counsel with the wisest I could find, while you were eating and hunting. I have laid my plans with foresight; they were ripe for action; and then—" she choked—"then you return—for a forenoon—to ruin all! To-morrow you will be once more about your pleasures; you will give us leave once more to think and work for you; and again you will come back, and again you will thwart what you had not the industry or knowledge to conceive. O! it is intolerable. Be modest, sir. Do not presume upon the rank you cannot worthily uphold. I would not issue my commands with so much gusto—it is from no merit in yourself they are obeyed. What are you? What have you to do in this grave council? Go," she cried, "go among your equals! The very people in the streets mock at you for a prince."

At this surprising outburst the whole council sat aghast.

"Madam," said the Baron, alarmed out of his caution, "command yourself."

"Address yourself to me, sir!" cried the Prince. "I will not bear these whisperings!"

Seraphina burst into tears.

"Sir," cried the Baron, rising, "this lady——"

"Herr von Gondremark," said the Prince, "one more observation, and I place you under arrest."

"Your Highness is the master," replied Gondremark, bowing.

"Bear it in mind more constantly," said Otto. "Herr

Cancellarius, bring all the papers to my cabinet. Gentlemen, the council is dissolved."

And he bowed and left the apartment, followed by Greisengesang and the secretaries, just at the moment when the Princess's ladies, summoned in all haste, entered by another door to help her forth.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PARTY OF WAR TAKES ACTION

Half an hour after, Gondremark was once more closeted with Seraphina.

"Where is he now?" she asked, on his arrival.

"Madam, he is with the Chancellor," replied the Baron. "Wonder of wonders, he is at work!"

"Ah," she said, "he was born to torture me! O what a fall, what a humiliation! Such a scheme to wreck upon so small a trifle! But now all is lost."

"Madam," said Gondremark, "nothing is lost. Something, on the other hand, is found. You have found your senses; you see him as he is—see him as you see everything where your too-good heart is not in question—with the judicial, with the statesman's eye. So long as he had a right to interfere, the empire that may be was still distant. I have not entered on this course without the plain foresight of its dangers; and even for this I was prepared. But, madam, I knew two things; I knew that you were born to command, that I was born to serve; I knew that by a rare conjuncture the hand had found the tool; and from the first I was confident, as I am confident to-day, that no hereditary trifler has the power to shatter that alliance."

"I, born to command!" she said. "Do you forget my tears?"

"Madam, they were the tears of Alexander," cried the Baron. "They touched, they thrilled me; I forgot myself a moment—even I! But do you suppose that I had not remarked, that I had not admired, your previous

bearing? your great self-command? Ay, that was princely!" He paused. "It was a thing to see. I drank confidence! I tried to imitate your calm. And I was well inspired; in my heart, I think that I was well inspired; that any man, within the reach of argument, had been convinced! But it was not to be; nor, madam, do I regret the failure. Let us be open; let me disclose my heart. I have loved two things, not unworthily: Grünewald and my sovereign!" Here he kissed her hand. "Either I must resign my ministry, leave the land of my adoption and the queen whom I had chosen to obey—or——" He paused again.

"Alas, Herr von Gondremark, there is no 'or,'" said Seraphina.

"Nay, madam, give me time," he replied. "When first I saw you, you were still young; not every man would have remarked your powers; but I had not been twice honoured by your conversation ere I had found my mistress. I have, madam, I believe, some genius; and I have much ambition. But the genius is of the serving kind; and to offer a career to my ambition, I had to find one born to rule. This is the base and essence of our union; each had need of the other; each recognised, master and servant, lever and fulcrum, the complement of his endowment. Marriages, they say, are made in heaven: how much more these pure, laborious, intellectual fellowships, born to found empires! Nor is this all. We found each other ripe, filled with great ideas that took shape and clarified with every word. We grew together—ay, madam, in mind we grew together like twin children. All of my life until we met was petty and groping; was it not—I will flatter myself openly—it *was* the same with you! Not till then had you those eagle surveys, that wide and hopeful sweep of intuition! Thus we had formed ourselves, and we were ready."

"It is true," she cried. "I feel it. Yours is the genius; your generosity confounds your insight; all I could offer

you was the position, was this throne, to be a fulcrum. But I offered it without reserve ; I entered at least warmly into all your thoughts ; you were sure of me—sure of my support—certain of justice. Tell me, tell me again, that I have helped you."

" Nay, madam," he said, " you made me. In everything you were my inspiration. And as we prepared our policy, weighing every step, how often have I had to admire your perspicacity, your man-like diligence and fortitude ! You know that these are not the words of flattery ; your conscience echoes them ; have you spared a day ? have you indulged yourself in any pleasure ? Young and beautiful, you have lived a life of high intellectual effort, of irksome intellectual patience with details. Well, you have your reward : with the fall of Brandenau the throne of your Empire is founded."

" What thought have you in your mind ? " she asked. " Is not all ruined ? "

" Nay, my Princess, the same thought is in both our minds," he said.

" Herr von Gondremark," she replied, " by all that I hold sacred, I have none ; I do not think at all ; I am crushed."

" You are looking at the passionate side of a rich nature, misunderstood and recently insulted," said the Baron. " Look into your intellect, and tell me."

" I find nothing, nothing but tumult," she replied.

" You find one word branded, madam," returned the Baron : " ' Abdication ! ' "

" O ! " she cried. " The coward ! He leaves me to bear all, and in the hour of trial he stabs me from behind. There is nothing in him, not respect, not love, not courage—his wife, his dignity, his throne, the honour of his father, he forgets them all ! "

" Yes," pursued the Baron, " the word Abdication. I perceive a glimmering there."

" I read your fancy," she returned. " It is mere

madness, midsummer madness. Baron, I am more unpopular than he. You know it. They can excuse, they can love, his weakness ; but me, they hate."

" Such is the gratitude of peoples," said the Baron. " But we trifle. Here, madam, are my plain thoughts. The man who in the hour of danger speaks of abdication is, for me, a venomous animal. I speak with the bluntness of gravity, madam ; this is no hour for mincing. The coward, in a station of authority, is more dangerous than fire. We dwell on a volcano ; if this man can have his way, Grünewald before a week will have been deluged with innocent blood. You know the truth of what I say ; we have looked unblenching into this ever-possible catastrophe. To him it is nothing : he will abdicate ! Abdicate, just God ! and this unhappy country committed to his charge, and the lives of men and the honour of women . . ." His voice appeared to fail him ; in an instant he had conquered his emotion and resumed : " But you, madam, conceive more worthily of your responsibilities. I am with you in the thought ; and in the face of the horrors that I see impending, I say, and your heart repeats it—we have gone too far to pause. Honour, duty, ay, and the care of our own lives, demand we should proceed."

She was looking at him, her brow thoughtfully knitted. " I feel it," she said. " But how ? He has the power."

" The power, madam ? The power is in the army," he replied ; and then hastily, ere she could intevene, " we have to save ourselves," he went on ; " I have to save my Princess, she has to save her minister ; we have both of us to save this infatuated youth from his own madness. He in the outbreak would be the earliest victim ; I see him," he cried, " torn in pieces ; and Grünewald, unhappy Grünewald ! Nay, madam, you who have the power must use it ; it lies hard upon your conscience."

" Show me how ! " she cried. " Suppose I were to place him under some constraint, the revolution would break upon us instantly."

The Baron feigned defeat. "It is true," he said. "You see more clearly than I do. Yet there should, there must be, some way." And he waited for his chance.

"No," she said; "I told you from the first there is no remedy. Our hopes are lost: lost by one miserable trifler, ignorant, fretful, fitful—who will have disappeared to-morrow, who knows? to his boorish pleasures!"

Any peg would do for Gondremark. "The thing!" he cried, striking his brow. "Fool, not to have thought of it! Madam, without perhaps knowing it, you have solved our problem."

"What do you mean? Speak!" she said.

He appeared to collect himself, and then, with a smile, "The Prince," he said, "must go once more a-hunting."

"Ay, if he would!" cried she, "and stay there!"

"And stay there," echoed the Baron. It was so significantly said, that her face changed; and the schemer, fearful of the sinister ambiguity of his expressions, hastened to explain. "This time he shall go hunting in a carriage, with a good escort of our foreign lancers. His destination shall be the Felsenburg; it is healthy, the rock is high, the windows are small and barred; it might have been built on purpose. We shall entrust the captaincy to the Scotsman Gordon; he at least will have no scruple. Who will miss the sovereign? He is gone hunting; he came home on Tuesday, on Thursday he returned; all is usual in that. Meanwhile the war proceeds; our Prince will soon weary of his solitude; and about the time of our triumph, or, if he prove very obstinate, a little later, he shall be released upon a proper understanding, and I see him once more directing his theatricals."

Seraphina sat gloomy, plunged in thought. "Yes," she said suddenly, "and the despatch? He is now writing it."

"It cannot pass the council before Friday," replied

Gondremark; "and as for any private note, the messengers are all at my disposal. They are picked men, madam. I am a person of precaution."

"It would appear so," she said, with a flash of her occasional repugnance to the man; and then after a pause, "Herr von Gondremark," she added, "I recoil from this extremity."

"I share your Highness's repugnance," answered he. "But what would you have? We are defenceless else."

"I see it, but this is sudden. It is a public crime," she said, nodding at him with a sort of horror.

"Look but a little deeper," he returned, "and whose is the crime?"

"His!" she cried. "His, before God! And I hold him liable. But still——"

"It is not as if he would be harmed," submitted Gondremark.

"I know it," she replied, but it was still unheartily.

And then, as brave men are entitled, by prescriptive right as old as the world's history, to the alliance and the active help of Fortune, the punctual goddess stepped down from the machine. One of the Princess's ladies begged to enter; a man, it appeared, had brought a line for the Freiherr von Gondremark. It proved to be a pencil billet, which the crafty Greisengesang had found the means to scribble and despatch under the very guns of Otto; and the daring of the act bore testimony to the terror of the actor. For Greisengesang had but one influential motive: fear. The note ran thus: "At the first council, procuration to be withdrawn.—Corn. Greis."

So, after three years of exercise, the right of signature was to be stript from Seraphina. It was more than an insult; it was a public disgrace; and she did not pause to consider how she had earned it, but morally bounded under the attack as bounds the wounded tiger.

"Enough," she said; "I will sign the order. When shall he leave?"

" It will take me twelve hours to collect my men, and it had best be done at night. To-morrow midnight, if you please ? " answered the Baron.

" Excellent," she said. " My door is always open to you, Baron. As soon as the order is prepared, bring it me to sign."

" Madam," he said, " alone of all of us you do not risk your head in this adventure. For that reason, and to prevent all hesitation, I venture to propose the order should be in your hand throughout."

" You are right," she replied.

He laid a form before her, and she wrote the order in a clear hand, and re-read it. Suddenly a cruel smile came on her face. " I had forgotten his puppet," said she. " They will keep each other company." And she interlined and initialled the condemnation of Dr. Gotthold.

" Your Highness has more memory than your servant," said the Baron ; and then he, in his turn, carefully perused the fateful paper. " Good ! " said he.

" You will appear in the drawing-room, Baron ? " she asked.

" I thought it better," said he, " to avoid the possibility of a public affront. Anything that shook my credit might hamper us in the immediate future."

" You are right," she said ; and she held out her hand as to an old friend and equal.

CHAPTER IX

THE PRICE OF THE RIVER FARM; IN WHICH VAIN-GLORY GOES BEFORE A FALL

The pistol had been practically fired. Under ordinary circumstances the scene at the council table would have entirely exhausted Otto's store both of energy and anger; he would have begun to examine and condemn his conduct, have remembered all that was true, forgotten all that was unjust in Seraphina's onslaught; and by half an hour after would have fallen into that state of mind in which a Catholic flees to the confessional and a sot takes refuge with the bottle. Two matters of detail preserved his spirits. For, first, he had still an infinity of business to transact; and to transact business, for a man of Otto's neglectful and procrastinating habits, is the best anodyne for conscience. All afternoon he was hard at it with the Chancellor, reading, dictating, signing, and despatching papers; and this kept him in a glow of self-approval. But, secondly, his vanity was still alarmed; he had failed to get the money; to-morrow before noon he would have to disappoint old Killian; and in the eyes of that family which counted him so little, and to which he had sought to play the part of the heroic comforter, he must sink lower than at first. To a man of Otto's temper, this was death. He could not accept the situation. And even as he worked, and worked wisely and well, over the hated details of his principality, he was secretly maturing a plan by which to turn the situation. It was a scheme as pleasing to the man as it was dishonourable in the prince; in which his frivolous nature

found and took vengeance for the gravity and burthen of the afternoon. He chuckled as he thought of it: and Greisengesang heard him with wonder, and attributed his lively spirits to the skirmish of the morning.

Led by this idea, the antique courtier ventured to compliment his sovereign on his bearing. It reminded him, he said, of Otto's father.

"What?" asked the Prince, whose thoughts were miles away.

"Your Highness's authority at the board," explained the flatterer.

"O, that! O, yes," returned Otto; but for all his carelessness, his vanity was delicately tickled, and his mind returned and dwelt approvingly over the details of his victory. "I quelled them all," he thought.

When the more pressing matters had been dismissed, it was already late, and Otto kept the Chancellor to dinner, and was entertained with a leash of ancient histories and modern compliments. The Chancellor's career had been based, from the first off-put, on entire subserviency; he had crawled into honours and employments; and his mind was prostitute. The instinct of the creature served him well with Otto. First, he let fall a sneering word or two upon the female intellect; thence he proceeded to a closer engagement; and before the third course he was artfully dissecting Seraphina's character to her approving husband. Of course no names were used; and of course the identity of that abstract or ideal man, with whom she was currently contrasted, remained an open secret. But this stiff old gentleman had a wonderful instinct for evil, thus to wind his way into man's citadel; thus to harp by the hour on the virtues of his hearer and not once alarm his self-respect. Otto was all roseate, in and out, with flattery and Tokay and an approving conscience. He saw himself in the most attractive colours. If even Greisengesang, he thought, could thus espy the loose stitches in Seraphina's character, and thus disloyally

impart them to the opposite camp, he, the discarded husband—the dispossessed Prince—could scarce have erred on the side of severity.

In this excellent frame he bade adieu to the old gentleman, whose voice had proved so musical, and set forth for the drawing-room. Already on the stair, he was seized with some compunction; but when he entered the great gallery and beheld his wife, the Chancellor's abstract flatteries fell from him like rain, and he reawoke to the poetic facts of life. She stood a good way off below a shining lustre, her back turned. The bend of her waist overcame him with physical weakness. This was the girl-wife who had lain in his arms and whom he had sworn to cherish; there was she, who was better than success.

It was Seraphina who restored him from the blow. She swam forward and smiled upon her husband with a sweetness that was insultingly artificial. "Frédéric," she lisped, "you are late." It was a scene of high comedy, such as is proper to unhappy marriages; and her *aplomb* disgusted him.

There was no etiquette at these small drawing-rooms. People came and went at pleasure. The window embrasures became the roost of happy couples; at the great chimney the talkers mostly congregated, each full-charged with scandal; and down at the farther end the gamblers gambled. It was towards this point that Otto moved, not ostentatiously, but with a gentle insistence, and scattering attentions as he went. Once abreast of the card-table, he placed himself opposite to Madame von Rosen, and, as soon as he had caught her eye, withdrew to the embrasure of a window. There she had speedily joined him.

"You did well to call me," she said, a little wildly. "These cards will be my ruin."

"Leave them," said Otto.

"I!" she cried, and laughed; "they are my destiny.

My only chance was to die of consumption; now I must die in a garret."

"You are bitter to-night," said Otto.

"I have been losing," she replied. "You do not know what greed is."

"I have come, then, in an evil hour," said he.

"Ah, you wish a favour!" she cried, brightening beautifully.

"Madam," said he, "I am about to found my party, and I come to you for a recruit."

"Done," said the Countess. "I am a man again."

"I may be wrong," continued Otto, "but I believe upon my heart you wish me no ill."

"I wish you so well," she said, "that I dare not tell it you."

"Then if I ask my favour?" quoth the Prince.

"Ask it, *mon Prince*," she answered. "Whatever it is, it is granted."

"I wish you," he returned, "this very night to make the farmer of our talk."

"Heaven knows your meaning!" she exclaimed. "I know not, neither care; there are no bounds to my desire to please you. Call him made."

"I will put it in another way," returned Otto. "Did you ever steal?"

"Often!" cried the Countess. "I have broken all the ten commandments; and if there were more to-morrow, I should not sleep till I had broken these."

"This is a case of burglary: to say the truth, I thought it would amuse you," said the Prince.

"I have no practical experience," she replied, "but O! the good-will! I have broken a work-box in my time, and several hearts, my own included. Never a house! But it cannot be difficult; sins are so unromantically easy! What are we to break?"

"Madam, we are to break the treasury," said Otto; and he sketched to her briefly, wittily, with here and

there a touch of pathos, the story of his visit to the farm, of his promise to buy it, and of the refusal with which his demand for money had been met that morning at the council; concluding with a few practical words as to the treasury windows, and the helps and hindrances of the proposed exploit.

"They refused you the money," she said when he had done. "And you accepted the refusal? Well!"

"They gave their reasons," replied Otto, colouring. "They were not such as I could combat; and I am driven to dilapidate the funds of my own country by a theft. It is not dignified; but it is fun."

"Fun," she said; "yes." And then she remained silently plunged in thought for an appreciable time. "How much do you require?" she asked at length.

"Three thousand crowns will do," he answered, "for I have still some money of my own."

"Excellent," she said, regaining her levity. "I am your true accomplice. And where are we to meet?"

"You know the Flying Mercury," he answered, "in the Park? Three pathways intersect; there they have made a seat and raised the statue. The spot is handy and the deity congenial."

"Child," she said, and tapped him with her fan. "But do you know, my Prince, you are an egoist—your handy trysting-place is miles from me. You must give me ample time; I cannot, I think, possibly be there before two. But as the bell beats two, your helper shall arrive: welcome, I trust. Stay—do you bring anyone?" she added. "O, it is not for a chaperon—I am not a prude!"

"I shall bring a groom of mine," said Otto. "I caught him stealing corn."

"His name?" she asked.

"I profess I know not. I am not yet intimate with my corn-stealer," returned the Prince. "It was in a professional capacity——"

"Like me! Flatterer!" she cried. "But oblige me

in one thing. Let me find you waiting at the seat—yes, you shall await me; for on this expedition it shall be no longer Prince and Countess, it shall be the lady and the squire—and your friend the thief shall be no nearer than the fountain. Do you promise?"

"Madam, in everything you are to command; you shall be captain, I am but supercargo," answered Otto.

"Well, Heaven bring all safe to port!" she said. "It is not Friday!"

Something in her manner had puzzled Otto, had possibly touched him with suspicion.

"Is it not strange," he remarked, "that I should choose my accomplice from the other camp?"

"Fool!" she said. "But it is your only wisdom that you know your friends." And suddenly, in the vantage of the deep window, she caught up his hand and kissed it with a sort of passion. "Now go," she added, "go at once."

He went, somewhat staggered, doubting in his heart that he was over-bold. For in that moment she had flashed upon him like a jewel; and even through the strong panoply of a previous love he had been conscious of a shock. Next moment he had dismissed the fear.

Both Otto and the Countess retired early from the drawing-room, and the Prince, after an elaborate feint, dismissed his valet, and went forth by the private passage and the back postern in quest of the groom.

Once more the stable was in darkness, once more Otto employed the talismanic knock, and once more the groom appeared and sickened with terror.

"Good-evening, friend," said Otto pleasantly. "I want you to bring a corn sack—empty this time—and to accompany me. We shall be gone all night."

"Your Highness," groaned the man, "I have the charge of the small stables. I am here alone."

"Come," said the Prince, "you are no such martinet in duty." And then seeing that the man was shaking

from head to foot, Otto laid a hand upon his shoulder. "If I meant you harm," he said, "should I be here?"

The fellow became instantly reassured. He got the sack; and Otto led him round by several paths and avenues, conversing pleasantly by the way, and left him at last planted by a certain fountain where a goggle-eyed Triton spouted intermittently into a rippling laver. Thence he proceeded alone to where, in a round clearing, a copy of Gian Bologna's Mercury stood tiptoe in the twilight of the stars. The night was warm and windless. A shaving of new moon had lately arisen; but it was still too small and too low down in heaven to contend with the immense host of lesser luminaries; and the rough face of the earth was drenched with starlight. Down one of the alleys, which widened as it receded, he could see a part of the lamplit terrace where a sentry silently paced, and beyond that a corner of the town with interlacing street-lights. But all around him the young trees stood mystically blurred in the dim shine; and in the stock-still quietness the upleaping god appeared alive.

In this dimness and silence of the night, Otto's conscience became suddenly and staringly luminous, like the dial of a city clock. He averted the eyes of his mind, but the finger, rapidly travelling, pointed to a series of misdeeds that took his breath away. What was he doing in that place? The money had been wrongly squandered, but that was largely by his own neglect. And he now proposed to embarrass the finances of this country which he had been too idle to govern. And he now proposed to squander the money once again, and this time for a private, if a generous end. And the man whom he had reproved for stealing corn he was now to set stealing treasure. And then there was Madame von Rosen, upon whom he looked down with some of that ill-favoured contempt of the chaste male for the imperfect woman. Because he thought of her as one degraded below scruples, he had picked her out to be still more degraded, and to risk her whole irregular

establishment in life by complicity in this dishonourable act. It was uglier than a seduction.

Otto had to walk very briskly and whistle very busily; and when at last he heard steps in the narrowest and darkest of the alleys, it was with a gush of relief that he sprang to meet the Countess. To wrestle alone with one's good angel is so hard! and so precious, at the proper time, is a companion certain to be less virtuous than oneself!

It was a young man who came towards him—a young man of small stature and a peculiar gait, wearing a wide flapping hat, and carrying, with great weariness, a heavy bag. Otto recoiled; but the young man held up his hand by way of signal, and coming up with a panting run, as if with the last of his endurance, laid the bag upon the ground, threw himself upon the bench, and disclosed the features of Madame von Rosen.

"You, Countess!" cried the Prince.

"No, no," she panted, "the Count von Rosen—my young brother. A capital fellow. Let him get his breath."

"Ah, madam . . ." said he.

"Call me Count," she returned, "respect my *incognito*."

"Count be it, then," he replied. "And let me implore that gallant gentleman to set forth at once on our enterprise."

"Sit down beside me here," she returned, patting the farther corner of the bench. "I will follow you in a moment. O, I am so tired—feel how my heart leaps! Where is your thief?"

"At his post," replied Otto. "Shall I introduce him? He seems an excellent companion."

"No," she said, "do not hurry me yet. I must speak to you. Not but I adore your thief; I adore anyone who has the spirit to do wrong. I never cared for virtue till I fell in love with my Prince." She laughed musically. "And even so, it is not for your virtues," she added.

Otto was embarrassed. "And now," he asked, "if you are anyway rested?"

"Presently, presently. Let me breathe," she said, panting a little harder than before.

"And what has so wearied you?" he asked. "This bag? And why, in the name of eccentricity, a bag? For an empty one, you might have relied on my own foresight; and this one is very far from being empty. My dear Count, with what trash have you come laden? But the shortest method is to see for myself." And he put down his hand.

She stopped him at once. "Otto," she said, "no—not that way. I will tell, I will make a clean breast. It is done already. I have robbed the treasury single-handed. There are three thousand two hundred crowns. O, I trust it is enough!"

Her embarrassment was so obvious that the Prince was struck into a muse, gazing in her face, with his hand still outstretched and she still holding him by the wrist. "You!" he said at last. "How?" And then drawing himself up, "O, madam," he cried, "I understand. You must indeed think meanly of the Prince."

"Well then, it was a lie!" she cried. "The money is mine, honestly my own—now yours. This was an unworthy act that you proposed. But I love your honour, and I swore to myself that I should save it in your teeth. I beg of you to let me save it"—with a sudden lovely change of tone. "Otto, I beseech you let me save it. Take this dross from your poor friend who loves you!"

"Madam, madam," babbled Otto, in the extreme of misery, "I cannot—I must go."

And he half rose; but she was on the ground before him in an instant, clasping his knees. "No," she gasped, "you shall not go. Do you despise me so entirely? It is dross; I hate it; I should squander it at play and be no richer; it is an investment; it is to save me from ruin. Otto," she cried, as he again feebly tried to put her from

him, " if you leave me alone in this disgrace I will die here ! " He groaned aloud. " O," she said, " think what I suffer ! If you suffer from a piece of delicacy, think what I suffer in my shame ! To have my trash refused ! You would rather steal, you think of me so basely ! You would rather tread my heart in pieces ! O unkind ! O my Prince ! O Otto ! O pity me ! " She was still clasping him ; then she found his hand and covered it with kisses, and at this his head began to turn. " O," she cried again, " I see it ! O what a horror ! It is because I am old, because I am no longer beautiful." And she burst into a storm of sobs.

This was the *coup de grâce*. Otto had now to comfort and compose her as he could, and before many words, the money was accepted. Between the woman and the weak man such was the inevitable end. Madame von Rosen instantly composed her sobs. She thanked him with a fluttering voice, and resumed her place upon the bench at the far end from Otto. " Now you see," she said, " why I bade you keep the thief at distance, and why I came alone. How I trembled for my treasure ! "

" Madam," said Otto, with a tearful whimper in his voice, " spare me ! You are too good, too noble ! "

" I wonder to hear you," she returned. " You have avoided a great folly. You will be able to meet your good old peasant. You have found an excellent investment for a friend's money. You have preferred essential kindness to an empty scruple ; and now you are ashamed of it ! You have made your friend happy ; and now you mourn as the dove ! Come, cheer up. I know it is depressing to have done exactly right ; but you need not make a practice of it. Forgive yourself this virtue ; come now, look me in the face and smile ! "

He did look at her. When a man has been embraced by a woman, he sees her in a glamour ; and at such a time, in the baffling glimmer of the stars, she will look wildly well. The hair is touched with light ; the eyes

are constellations; the face sketched in shadows — a sketch, you might say, by passion. Otto became consoled for his defeat; he began to take an interest. "No," he said, "I am no ingrate."

"You promised me fun," she returned, with a laugh. "I have given you as good. We have had a stormy *scena*."

He laughed in his turn, and the sound of the laughter, in either case, was hardly reassuring.

"Come, what are you going to give me in exchange," she continued, "for my excellent declamation?"

"What you will," he said.

"Whatever I will? Upon your honour? Suppose I ask the crown?" She was flashing upon him, beautiful in triumph.

"Upon my honour," he replied.

"Shall I ask the crown?" she continued. "Nay; what should I do with it? Grünewald is but a petty state; my ambition swells above it. I shall ask—I find I want nothing," she concluded. "I will give you something instead. I will give you leave to kiss me—once."

Otto drew near, and she put up her face; they were both smiling, both on the brink of laughter, all was so innocent and playful; and the Prince, when their lips encountered, was dumfoundered by the sudden convulsion of his being. Both drew instantly apart, and for an appreciable time sat tongue-tied. Otto was indistinctly conscious of a peril in the silence, but could find no words to utter. Suddenly the Countess seemed to awake. "As for your wife——" she began in a clear and steady voice.

The word recalled Otto, with a shudder, from his trance. "I will hear nothing against my wife," he cried wildly; and then, recovering himself and in a kindlier tone, "I will tell you my one secret," he added. "I love my wife."

"You should have let me finish," she returned, smiling. "Do you suppose I did not mention her on purpose? You know you had lost your head. Well, so had I. Come

now, do not be abashed by words," she added somewhat sharply. " It is the one thing I despise. If you are not a fool, you will see that I am building fortresses about your virtue. And at any rate, I choose that you shall understand that I am not dying of love for you. It is a very smiling business ; no tragedy for me ! And now here is what I have to say about your wife : she is not and she never has been Gondremark's mistress. Be sure he would have boasted if she had. Good-night ! "

And in a moment she was gone down the alley, and Otto was alone with the bag of money and the flying god.

CHAPTER X

GOTTHOLD'S REVISED OPINION; AND THE FALL COMPLETED

THE Countess left poor Otto with a caress and buffet simultaneously administered. The welcome word about his wife and the virtuous ending of his interview should doubtless have delighted him. But for all that, as he shouldered the bag of money and set forward to rejoin his groom, he was conscious of many aching sensibilities. To have gone wrong and to have been set right makes but a double trial for man's vanity. The discovery of his own weakness and possible unfaith had staggered him to the heart; and to hear, in the same hour, of his wife's fidelity from one who loved her not, increased the bitterness of the surprise.

He was about halfway between the fountain and the Flying Mercury before his thoughts began to be clear; and he was surprised to find them resentful. He paused in a kind of temper, and struck with his hand a little shrub. Thence there arose instantly a cloud of awakened sparrows, which as instantly dispersed and disappeared into the thicket. He looked at them stupidly, and when they were gone continued staring at the stars. "I am angry. By what right? By none!" he thought; but he was still angry. He cursed Madame von Rosen and instantly repented. Heavy was the money on his shoulders.

When he reached the fountain, he did, out of ill-humour and parade, an unpardonable act. He gave the money bodily to the dishonest groom. "Keep this for me," he said, "until I call for it to-morrow. It is a great sum, and

by that you will judge that I have not condemned you." And he strode away ruffling, as if he had done something generous. It was a desperate stroke to re-enter at the point of the bayonet into his self-esteem; and, like all such, it was fruitless in the end. He got to bed with the devil, it appeared: kicked and tumbled till the grey of the morning; and then fell inopportunely into a leaden slumber, and awoke to find it ten. To miss the appointment with old Killian after all had been too tragic a miscarriage: and he hurried with all his might, found the groom (for a wonder) faithful to his trust, and arrived only a few minutes before noon in the guest-chamber of the "Morning Star." Killian was there in his Sunday's best and looking very gaunt and rigid; a lawyer from Brandenau stood sentinel over his outspread papers; and the groom and the landlord of the inn were called to serve as witnesses. The obvious deference of that great man, the innkeeper, plainly affected the old farmer with surprise; but it was not until Otto had taken the pen and signed that the truth flashed upon him fully. Then, indeed, he was beside himself.

"His Highness!" he cried, "His Highness!" and repeated the exclamation till his mind had grappled fairly with the facts. Then he turned to the witnesses. "Gentlemen," he said, "you dwell in a country highly favoured by God; for of all generous gentlemen, I will say it on my conscience, this one is the king. I am an old man, and I have seen good and bad, and the year of the great famine; but a more excellent gentleman, no, never."

"We know that," cried the landlord, "we know that well in Grünewald. If we saw more of his Highness we should be the better pleased."

"It is the kindest Prince," began the groom, and suddenly closed his mouth upon a sob, so that every one turned to gaze upon his emotion—Otto not last; Otto struck with remorse, to see the man so grateful.

Then it was the lawyer's turn to pay a compliment.

" I do not know what Providence may hold in store," he said, " but this day should be a bright one in the annals of your reign. The shouts of armies could not be more eloquent than the emotion on these honest faces." And the Brandenau lawyer bowed, skipped, stepped back and took snuff, with the air of a man who has found and seized an opportunity.

" Well, young gentleman," said Killian, " if you will pardon me the plainness of calling you a gentleman, many a good day's work you have done, I doubt not, but never a better, or one that will be better blessed ; and whatever, sir, may be your happiness and triumph in that high sphere to which you have been called, it will be none the worse, sir, for an old man's blessing ! "

The scene had almost assumed the proportions of an ovation ; and when the Prince escaped he had but one thought : to go wherever he was most sure of praise. His conduct at the board of council occurred to him as a fair chapter ; and this evoked the memory of Gotthold. To Gotthold he would go.

Gotthold was in the library as usual, and laid down his pen, a little angrily, on Otto's entrance. " Well," he said, " here you are."

" Well," returned Otto, " we made a revolution, I believe."

" It is what I fear," returned the Doctor.

" How ? " said Otto. " Fear ? Fear is the burnt child. I have learned my strength and the weakness of the others ; and I now mean to govern."

Gotthold said nothing, but he looked down and smoothed his chin.

" You disapprove ? " cried Otto. " You are a weather-cock."

" On the contrary," replied the Doctor. " My observation has confirmed my fears. It will not do, Otto, not do."

" What will not do ? " demanded the Prince, with a sickening stab of pain.

"None of it," answered Gotthold. "You are unfitted for a life of action; you lack the stamina, the habit, the restraint, the patience. Your wife is greatly better, vastly better; and though she is in bad hands, displays a very different aptitude. She is a woman of affairs; you are—dear boy, you are yourself. I bid you back to your amusements; like a smiling dominie, I give you holidays for life. Yes," he continued, "there is a day appointed for all when they shall turn again upon their own philosophy. I had grown to disbelieve impartially in all; and if in the atlas of the sciences there were two charts I disbelieved in more than all the rest, they were politics and morals. I had a sneaking kindness for your vices; as they were negative, they flattered my philosophy; and I called them almost virtues. Well, Otto, I was wrong; I have forsworn my sceptical philosophy; and I perceive your faults to be unpardonable. You are unfit to be a Prince, unfit to be a husband. And I give you my word, I would rather see a man capably doing evil than blundering about good."

Otto was still silent, in extreme dudgeon.

Presently the Doctor resumed: "I will take the smaller matter first: your conduct to your wife. You went, I hear, and had an explanation. That may have been right or wrong; I know not; at least, you had stirred her temper. At the council she insults you; well, you insult her back—a man to a woman, a husband to his wife, in public! Next, upon the back of this, you propose—the story runs like wildfire—to recall the power of signature. Can she ever forgive that? a woman—a young woman—ambitious, conscious of talents beyond yours? Never, Otto. And to sum all, at such a crisis in your married life, you get into a window corner with that ogling dame von Rosen. I do not dream that there was any harm; but I do say it was an idle disrespect to your wife. Why, man, the woman is not decent."

"Gotthold," said Otto, "I will hear no evil of the Countess."

"You will certainly hear no good of her," returned Gotthold; "and if you wish your wife to be the pink of nicety, you should clear your court of demi-reputations."

"The commonplace injustice of a by-word," Otto cried. "The partiality of sex. She is a demirep; what then is Gondremark? Were she a man——"

"It would be all one," retorted Gotthold roughly. "When I see a man, come to years of wisdom, who speaks in double-meanings and is the braggart of his vices, I spit on the other side. 'You, my friend,' say I, 'are not even a gentleman.' Well, she's not even a lady."

"She is the best friend I have, and I choose that she shall be respected," Otto said.

"If she is your friend, so much the worse," replied the Doctor. "It will not stop there."

"Ah!" cried Otto, "there is the charity of virtue! All evil in the spotted fruit. But I can tell you, sir, that you do Madame von Rosen prodigal injustice."

"You can tell me!" said the Doctor shrewdly. "Have you tried? have you been riding the marches?"

The blood came into Otto's face.

"Ah!" cried Gotthold, "look at your wife and blush! There's a wife for a man to marry and then lose! She's a carnation, Otto. The soul is in her eyes."

"You have changed your note for Seraphina, I perceive," said Otto.

"Changed it!" cried the Doctor, with a flush. "Why, when was it different? But I own I admired her at the council. When she sat there silent, tapping with her foot, I admired her as I might a hurricane. Were I one of those who venture upon matrimony, there had been the prize to tempt me! She invites, as Mexico invited Cortez; the enterprise is hard, the natives are unfriendly—I believe them cruel too—but the metropolis is paved with gold and the breeze blows out of paradise. Yes, I could desire to be that conqueror. But to philander with von Rosen! never!

Senses? I discard them; what are they?—pruritus! Curiosity? Reach me my Anatomy!"

"To whom do you address yourself?" cried Otto. "Surely you, of all men, know that I love my wife!"

"O, love!" cried Gotthold; "love is a great word; it is in all the dictionaries. If you had loved, she would have paid you back. What does she ask? A little ardour!"

"It is hard to love for two," replied the Prince.

"Hard? Why, there's the touchstone! O, I know my poets!" cried the Doctor. "We are but dust and fire, too arid to endure life's scorching; and love, like the shadow of a great rock, should lend shelter and refreshment, not to the lover only, but to his mistress and to the children that reward them; and their very friends should seek repose in the fringes of that peace. Love is not love that cannot build a home. And you call it love to grudge and quarrel and pick faults? You call it love to thwart her to her face, and bandy insults? Love!"

"Gotthold, you are unjust. I was then fighting for my country," said the Prince.

"Ay, and there's the worst of all," returned the Doctor. "You could not even see that you were wrong; that, being where they were, retreat was ruin."

"Why, you supported me!" cried Otto.

"I did. I was a fool like you," replied Gotthold. "But now my eyes are open. If you go on as you have started, disgrace this fellow Gondremark, and publish the scandal of your divided house, there will befall a most abominable thing in Grünewald. A revolution, friend—a revolution."

"You speak strangely for a red," said Otto.

"A red republican, but not a revolutionary," returned the Doctor. "An ugly thing is a Grünewalder drunk! One man alone can save the country from this pass, and that is the double-dealer Gondremark, with whom I conjure you to make peace. It will not be you; it never can be you:—you, who can do nothing, as your wife said, but

trade upon your station—you, who spent the hours in begging money! And in God's name, what for? Why money? What mystery of idiocy was this?"

"It was to no ill end. It was to buy a farm," quoth Otto sulkily.

"To buy a farm!" cried Gotthold. "Buy a farm!"

"Well, what then?" returned Otto. "I have bought it, if you come to that."

Gotthold fairly bounded on his seat. "And how that?" he cried.

"How?" repeated Otto, startled.

"Ay, verily, how!" returned the Doctor. "How came you by the money?"

The Prince's countenance darkened. "That is my affair," said he.

"You see you are ashamed," retorted Gotthold. "And so you bought a farm in the hour of your country's need—doubtless to be ready for the abdication; and I put it that you stole the funds. There are not three ways of getting money: there are but two: to earn and steal. And now, when you have combined Charles the Fifth and Long-fingered Tom, you come to me to fortify your vanity! But I will clear my mind upon this matter: until I know the right and wrong of the transaction, I put my hand behind my back. A man may be the pitifullest prince; he must be a spotless gentleman."

The Prince had gotten to his feet, as pale as paper. "Gotthold," he said, "you drive me beyond bounds. Beware, sir, beware!"

"Do you threaten me, friend Otto?" asked the Doctor grimly. "That would be a strange conclusion."

"When have you ever known me use my power in any private animosity?" cried Otto. "To any private man your words were an unpardonable insult, but at me you shoot in full security, and I must turn aside to compliment you on your plainness. I must do more than pardon, I must admire, because you have faced this—this formidable

monarch, like a Nathan before David. You have uprooted an old kindness, sir, with an unsparing hand. You leave me very bare. My last bond is broken; and though I take Heaven to witness that I sought to do the right, I have this reward: to find myself alone. You say I am no gentleman; yet the sneers have been upon your side; and though I can very well perceive where you have lodged your sympathies, I will forbear the taunt."

"Otto, are you insane?" cried Gotthold, leaping up. "Because I ask you how you came by certain moneys, and because you refuse——"

"Herr von Hohenstockwitz, I have ceased to invite your aid in my affairs," said Otto. "I have heard all that I desire, and you have sufficiently trampled on my vanity. It may be that I cannot govern, it may be that I cannot love—you tell me so with every mark of honesty; but God has granted me one virtue, and I can still forgive. I forgive you; even in this hour of passion I can perceive my faults and your excuses; and if I desire that in future I may be spared your conversation, it is not, sir, from resentment—not resentment—but, by Heaven, because no man on earth could endure to be so rated. You have the satisfaction to see your sovereign weep; and that person whom you have so often taunted with his happiness reduced to the last pitch of solitude and misery. No,—I will hear nothing; I claim the last word, sir, as your Prince; and that last word shall be—forgiveness."

And with that Otto was gone from the apartment, and Dr. Gotthold was left alone with the most conflicting sentiments of sorrow, remorse, and merriment; walking to and fro before his table, and asking himself, with hands uplifted, which of the pair of them was most to blame for this unhappy rupture. Presently, he took from a cupboard a bottle of Rhine wine and a goblet of the deep Bohemian ruby. The first glass a little warmed and comforted his bosom; with the second he began to look down upon these troubles from a sunny mountain; yet a while, and

filled with this false comfort and contemplating life through a golden medium, he owned to himself, with a flush, a smile, and a half-pleasurable sigh, that he had been somewhat over plain in dealing with his cousin. "He said the truth, too," added the penitent librarian, "for in my monkish fashion I adore the Princess." And then, with a still deepening flush and a certain stealth, although he sat all alone in that great gallery, he toasted Seraphina to the dregs.

CHAPTER XI

PROVIDENCE VON ROSEN: ACT THE FIRST SHE BEGUILES THE BARON

At a sufficiently late hour, or, to be more exact, at three in the afternoon, Madame von Rosen issued on the world. She swept downstairs and out across the garden, a black mantilla thrown over her head, and the long train of her black velvet dress ruthlessly sweeping in the dirt.

At the other end of that long garden, and back to back with the villa of the Countess, stood the large mansion where the Prime Minister transacted his affairs and pleasures. This distance, which was enough for decency by the easy canons of Mittwalden, the Countess swiftly traversed, opened a little door with a key, mounted a flight of stairs, and entered unceremoniously into Gondremark's study. It was a large and very high apartment; books all about the walls, papers on the table, papers on the floor; here and there a picture, somewhat scant of drapery; a great fire glowing and flaming in the blue-tiled hearth; and the daylight streaming through a cupola above. In the midst of this sat the great Baron Gondremark in his shirt-sleeves, his business for that day fairly at an end, and the hour arrived for relaxation. His expression, his very nature, seemed to have undergone a fundamental change. Gondremark at home appeared the very antipode of Gondremark on duty. He had an air of massive jollity that well became him; grossness and geniality sat upon his features; and along with his manners, he had laid aside his sly and sinister expression. He lolled there, sunning his bulk before the fire, a noble animal.

"Hey!" he cried. "At last!"

The Countess stepped into the room in silence, threw herself on a chair, and crossed her legs. In her lace and velvet, with a good display of smooth black stocking and of snowy petticoat, and with the refined profile of her face and slender plumpness of her body, she showed in singular contrast to the big, black, intellectual satyr by the fire.

"How often do you send for me?" she cried. "It is compromising."

Gondremark laughed. "Speaking of that," said he, "what in the devil's name were you about? You were not home till morning."

"I was giving alms," she said.

The Baron again laughed loud and long, for in his shirt-sleeves he was a very mirthful creature. "It is fortunate I am not jealous," he remarked. "But you know my way: pleasure and liberty go hand in hand. I believe what I believe; it is not much, but I believe it.—But now to business. Have you not read my letter?"

"No," she said; "my head ached."

"Ah, well! then I have news indeed!" cried Gondremark. "I was mad to see you all last night and all this morning: for yesterday afternoon I brought my long business to a head; the ship has come home; one more dead lift, and I shall cease to fetch and carry for the Princess Ratafia. Yes, 'tis done. I have the order all in Ratafia's hand; I carry it on my heart. At the hour of twelve to-night, Prince Featherhead is to be taken in his bed, and, like the bambino, whipped into a chariot; and by next morning he will command a most romantic prospect from the donjon of the Felsenburg. Farewell, Featherhead! The war goes on, the girl is in my hand; I have long been indispensable, but now I shall be sole. I have long," he added exultingly, "long carried this intrigue upon my shoulders, like Samson with the gates of Gaza; now I discharge that burthen."

She had sprung to her feet a little paler. "Is this true?" she cried.

"I tell you a fact," he asseverated. "The trick is played."

"I will never believe it," she said. "An order? In her own hand? I will never believe it, Heinrich."

"I swear to you," said he.

"O, what do you care for oaths—or I either? What would you swear by? Wine, women, and song? It is not binding," she said. She had come quite close up to him and laid her hand upon his arm. "As for the order—no, Heinrich, never! I will never believe it. I will die ere I believe it. You have some secret purpose—what, I cannot guess—but not one word of it is true."

"Shall I show it you?" he asked.

"You cannot," she answered. "There is no such thing."

"Incorrigible Sadducee!" he cried. "Well, I will convert you; you shall see the order." He moved to a chair where he had thrown his coat, and then drawing forth and holding out a paper, "Read," said he.

She took it greedily, and her eye flashed as she perused it.

"Hey!" cried the Baron, "there falls a dynasty, and it was I that felled it; and I and you inherit!" He seemed to swell in stature; and next moment, with a laugh, he put his hand forward. "Give me the dagger," said he.

But she whisked the paper suddenly behind her back and faced him, lowering. "No, no," she said. "You and I have first a point to settle. Do you suppose me blind? She could never have given that paper but to one man, and that man her lover. Here you stand—her lover, her accomplice, her master—O, I well believe it, for I know your power. But what am I?" she cried; "I, whom you deceive?"

"Jealousy!" cried Gondremark. "Anna, I would

never have believed it! But I declare to you by all that's credible that I am not her lover. I might be, I suppose; but I never yet durst risk the declaration. The chit is so unreal; a mincing doll; she will and she will not; there is no counting on her, by God! And hitherto I have had my own way without, and keep the lover in reserve. And I say, Anna," he added with severity, "you must break yourself of this new fit, my girl; there must be no combustion. I keep the creature under the belief that I adore her; and if she caught a breath of you and me, she is such a fool, prude, and dog in the manger, that she is capable of spoiling all."

"All very fine," returned the lady. "With whom do you pass your days? and which am I to believe, your words or your actions?"

"Anna, the devil take you, are you blind?" cried Gondremark. "You know me. Am I likely to care for such a preciosa? 'Tis hard that we should have been together for so long, and you should still take me for a troubadour. But if there is one thing that I despise and deprecate, it is all such figures in Berlin wool. Give me a human woman—like yourself. You are my mate; you were made for me; you amuse me like the play. And what have I to gain that I should pretend to you? If I do not love you, what use are you to me? Why, none. It is as clear as noonday."

"Do you love me, Heinrich?" she asked, languishing. "Do you truly?"

"I tell you," he cried, "I love you next after myself. I should be all abroad if I had lost you."

"Well, then," said she, folding up the paper and putting it calmly in her pocket, "I will believe you, and I join the plot. Count upon me. At midnight, did you say? It is Gordon, I see, that you have charged with it. Excellent; he will stick at nothing."

Gondremark watched her suspiciously. "Why do you take the paper?" he demanded. "Give it here."

" No," she returned; " I mean to keep it. It is I who must prepare the stroke; you cannot manage it without me; and to do my best I must possess the paper. Where shall I find Gordon? In his rooms?" She spoke with a rather feverish self-possession.

" Anna," he said sternly, the black, bilious countenance of his palace *rôle* taking the place of the more open favour of his hours at home, " I ask you for that paper. Once, twice, and thrice."

" Heinrich," she returned, looking him in the face, " take care. I will put up with no dictation."

Both looked dangerous; and the silence lasted for a measurable interval of time. Then she made haste to have the first word; and with a laugh that rang clear and honest, " Do not be a child," she said. " I wonder at you. If your assurances are true, you can have no reason to mistrust me, nor I to play you false. The difficulty is to get the Prince out of the palace without scandal. His valets are devoted; his chamberlain a slave; and yet one cry might ruin all."

" They must be overpowered," he said, following her to the new ground, " and disappear along with him."

" And your whole scheme along with them!" she cried. " He does not take his servants when he goes a-hunting: a child could read the truth. No, no; the plan is idiotic; it must be Ratafia's. But hear me. You know the Prince worships me?"

" I know," he said. " Poor Featherhead, I cross his destiny!"

" Well now," she continued, " what if I bring him alone out of the palace, to some quiet corner of the Park—the Flying Mercury, for instance? Gordon can be posted in the thicket; the carriage wait behind the temple; not a cry, not a scuffle, not a footfall; simply, the Prince vanishes!—What do you say? Am I an able ally? Are my *beaux yeux* of service? Ah, Heinrich, do not lose your Anna!—she has power!"

He struck with his open hand upon the chimney. "Witch!" he said, "there is not your match for devilry in Europe. Service! the thing runs on wheels."

"Kiss me, then, and let me go. I must not miss my Featherhead," she said.

"Stay, stay," said the Baron; "not so fast. I wish, upon my soul, that I could trust you; but you are, out and in, so whimsical a devil that I dare not. Hang it, Anna, no; it's not possible!"

"You doubt me, Heinrich?" she cried.

"Doubt is not the word," said he. "I know you. Once you were clear of me with that paper in your pocket, who knows what you would do with it?—not you, at least—nor I. You see," he added, shaking his head paternally upon the Countess, "you are as vicious as a monkey."

"I swear to you," she cried, "by my salvation . . ."

"I have no curiosity to hear you swearing," said the Baron.

"You think that I have no religion? You suppose me destitute of honour. Well," she said, "see here: I will not argue, but I tell you once for all: leave me this order, and the Prince shall be arrested—take it from me, and, as certain as I speak, I will upset the coach. Trust me, or fear me; take your choice." And she offered him the paper.

The Baron, in a great contention of mind, stood irresolute, weighing the two dangers. Once his hand advanced, then dropped. "Well," he said, "since trust is what you call it . . ."

"No more," she interrupted. "Do not spoil your attitude. And now since you have behaved like a good sort of fellow in the dark, I will condescend to tell you why. I go to the palace to arrange with Gordon; but how is Gordon to obey me? And how can I foresee the hours? It may be midnight; ay, and it may be nightfall; all's a chance; and to act, I must be free and hold the

strings of the adventure. And now," she cried, "your Vivien goes. Dub me your knight!" And she held out her arms and smiled upon him radiant.

"Well," he said, when he had kissed her, "every man must have his folly; I thank God mine is no worse. Off with you! I have given a child a squib."

CHAPTER XII

PROVIDENCE VON ROSEN: ACT THE SECOND SHE INFORMS THE PRINCE

It was the first impulse of Madame von Rosen to return to her own villa and revise her toilette. Whatever else should come of this adventure it was her firm design to pay a visit to the Princess. And before that woman, so little beloved, the Countess would appear at no disadvantage. It was the work of minutes. Von Rosen had the captain's eye in matters of the toilette; she was none of those who hang in Fabian helplessness among their finery, and, after hours, come forth upon the world as dowdies. A glance, a loosened curl, a studied and admired disorder in the hair, a bit of lace, a touch of colour, a yellow rose in the bosom; and the instant picture was complete.

"That will do," she said. "Bid my carriage follow me to the palace. In half an hour it should be there in waiting."

The night was beginning to fall and the shops to shine with lamps along the tree-beshadowed thoroughfares of Otto's capital, when the Countess started on her high emprise. She was jocund at heart; pleasure and interest had winged her beauty, and she knew it. She paused before the glowing jeweller's; she remarked and praised a costume in the milliner's window; and when she reached the lime-tree walk, with its high, umbrageous arches and stir of passers-by in the dim alleys, she took her place upon a bench and began to dally with the pleasures of the hour. It was cold, but she did not feel it, being warm within; her thoughts, in that dark corner, shone like the gold and

rubies at the jeweller's ; her ears, which heard the brushing of so many footfalls, transposed it into music.

What was she to do ? She held the paper by which all depended. Otto and Gondremark and Ratafia, and the state itself, hung light in her balances, as light as dust ; her little finger laid in either scale would set all flying : and she hugged herself upon her huge preponderance, and then laughed aloud to think how giddily it might be used. The vertigo of omnipotence, the disease of Cæsars, shook her reason. " O, the mad world ! " she thought, and laughed aloud in exultation.

A child, finger in mouth, had paused a little way from where she sat, and stared with cloudy interest upon this laughing lady. She called it nearer ; but the child hung back. Instantly, with that curious passion which you may see any woman in the world display, on the most odd occasions, for a similar end, the Countess bent herself with singleness of mind to overcome this diffidence ; and presently, sure enough, the child was seated on her knee, thumbing and glowering at her watch.

" If you had a clay bear and a china monkey," asked von Rosen, " which would you prefer to break ? "

" But I have neither," said the child.

" Well," she said, " here is a bright florin, with which you may purchase both the one and the other ; and I shall give it you at once, if you will answer my question. The clay bear or the china monkey—come ? "

But the unbreeched soothsayer only stared upon the florin with big eyes ; the oracle could not be persuaded to reply ; and the Countess kissed him lightly, gave him the florin, set him down upon the path, and resumed her way with swinging and elastic gait.

" Which shall I break ? " she wondered ; and she passed her hand with delight among the careful disarrangement of her locks. " Which ? " and she consulted heaven with her bright eyes. " Do I love both or neither ? A little — passionately — not at all ? Both or neither —

both, I believe; but at least I will make hay of Ratafia."

By the time she had passed the iron gates, mounted the drive, and set her foot upon the broad-flagged terrace, the night had come completely; the palace front was thick with lighted windows; and along the balustrade, the lamp on every twentieth baluster shone clear. A few withered tracks of sunset, amber and glow-worm green, still lingered in the western sky; and she paused once again to watch them fading.

"And to think," she said, "that here am I—destiny embodied, a norn, a fate, a providence—and have no guess upon which side I shall declare myself! What other woman in my place would not be prejudiced, and think herself committed? But, thank Heaven! I was born just!" Otto's windows were bright among the rest, and she looked on them with rising tenderness. "How does it feel to be deserted?" she thought. "Poor dear fool! The girl deserves that he should see this order."

Without more delay, she passed into the palace and asked for an audience of Prince Otto. The Prince, she was told, was in his own apartment, and desired to be private. She sent her name. A man presently returned with word that the Prince tendered his apologies, but could see no one. "Then I will write," she said, and scribbled a few lines alleging urgency of life and death. "Help me, my Prince," she added; "none but you can help me." This time the messenger returned more speedily, and begged the Countess to follow him: the Prince was graciously pleased to receive the Frau Gräfin von Rosen.

Otto sat by the fire in his large armoury, weapons faintly glittering all about him in the changeful light. His face was disfigured by the marks of weeping; he looked sour and sad; nor did he rise to greet his visitor, but bowed, and bade the man begone. That kind of general tenderness which served the Countess for both heart and conscience, sharply smote her at this spectacle of grief and weakness;

she began immediately to enter into the spirit of her part; and as soon as they were alone, taking one step forward and with a magnificent gesture—"Up!" she cried.

"Madame von Rosen," replied Otto dully, "you have used strong words. You speak of life and death. Pray, madam, who is threatened? Who is there," he added bitterly, "so destitute that even Otto of Grünewald can assist him?"

"First learn," said she, "the names of the conspirators: the Princess and the Baron Gondremark. Can you not guess the rest?" And then, as he maintained his silence—"You!" she cried, pointing at him with her finger. "'Tis you they threaten! Your rascal and mine have laid their heads together and condemned you. But they reckoned without you and me. We make a *partie carrée*, Prince, in love and politics. They lead an ace, but we shall trump it. Come, partner, shall I draw my card?"

"Madam," he said, "explain yourself. Indeed I fail to comprehend."

"See, then," said she: and handed him the order.

He took it, looked upon it with a start; and then, still without speech, he put his hand before his face. She waited for a word in vain.

"What!" she cried, "do you take the thing downheartedly? As well seek wine in a milk-pail as love in that girl's heart! Be done with this, and be a man. After the league of the lions, let us have a conspiracy of mice, and pull this piece of machinery to ground. You were brisk enough last night when nothing was at stake and all was frolic. Well, here is better sport; here is life indeed."

He got to his feet with some alacrity, and his face, which was a little flushed, bore the marks of resolution.

"Madame von Rosen," said he, "I am neither unconscious nor ungrateful; this is the true continuation of your friendship; but I see that I must disappoint your expectations. You seem to expect from me some effort

of resistance ; but why should I resist ? I have not much to gain ; and now that I have read this paper, and the last of a fool's paradise is shattered, it would be hyperbolical to speak of loss in the same breath with Otto of Grünewald. I have no party, no policy ; no pride, nor anything to be proud of. For what benefit or principle under Heaven do you expect me to contend ? Or would you have me bite and scratch like a trapped weasel ? No, madam ; signify to those who sent you my readiness to go. I would at least avoid a scandal."

" You go ?—of your own will, you go ? " she cried.

" I cannot say so much, perhaps," he answered ; " but I go with good alacrity. I have desired a change some time ; behold one offered me ! Shall I refuse ? Thank God, I am not so destitute of humour as to make a tragedy of such a farce." He flicked the order on the table. " You may signify my readiness," he added grandly.

" Ah," she said, " you are more angry than you own."

" I, madam ? angry ? " he cried. " You rave ! I have no cause for anger. In every way I have been taught my weakness, my instability, and my unfitness for the world. I am a plexus of weaknesses, an impotent Prince, a doubtful gentleman ; and you yourself, indulgent as you are, have twice reproved my levity. And shall I be angry ? I may feel the unkindness, but I have sufficient honesty of mind to see the reasons of this *coup d'état.*"

" From whom have you got this ? " she cried in wonder. " You think you have not behaved well ? My Prince, were you not young and handsome, I should detest you for your virtues. You push them to the verge of commonplace. And this ingratitude——"

" Understand me, Madame von Rosen," returned the Prince, flushing a little darker, " there can be here no talk of gratitude, none of pride. You are here, by what circumstance I know not, but doubtless led by your kindness, mixed up in what regards my family alone. You have no knowledge what my wife, your sovereign, may have

suffered ; it is not for you—no, nor for me—to judge. I own myself in fault ; and were it otherwise, a man were a very empty boaster who should talk of love and start before a small humiliation. It is in all the copybooks that one should die to please his ladylove ; and shall a man not go to prison ? "

" Love ? And what has love to do with being sent to gaol ? " exclaimed the Countess, appealing to the walls and roof. " Heaven knows I think as much of love as any one ; my life would prove it ; but I admit no love, at least for a man, that is not equally returned. The rest is moonshine."

" I think of love more absolutely, madam, though I am certain no more tenderly, than a lady to whom I am indebted for such kindnesses," returned the Prince. " But this is unavailing. We are not here to hold a court of troubadours."

" Still," she replied, " there is one thing you forget. If she conspires with Gondremark against your liberty, she may conspire with him against your honour also."

" My honour ? " he repeated. " For a woman, you surprise me. If I have failed to gain her love or play my part of husband, what right is left me ? or what honour can remain in such a scene of defeat ? No honour that I recognise. I am become a stranger. If my wife no longer loves me, I will go to prison, since she wills it ; if she love another, where should I be more in place ? or whose fault is it but mine ? You speak, Madame von Rosen, like too many women, with a man's tongue. Had I myself fallen into temptation (as, Heaven knows, I might) I should have trembled, but still hoped and asked for her forgiveness ; and yet mine had been a treason in the teeth of love. But let me tell you, madam," he pursued, with rising irritation, " where a husband by futility, facility, and ill-timed humours has outwearied his wife's patience, I will suffer neither man nor woman to misjudge her. She is free ; the man has been found wanting."

"Because she loves you not?" the Countess cried. "You know she is incapable of such a feeling."

"Rather, it was I who was born incapable of inspiring it," said Otto.

Madame von Rosen broke into sudden laughter. "Fool," she cried, "I am in love with you myself!"

"Ah, madam, you are most compassionate," the Prince retorted, smiling. "But this is waste debate. I know my purpose. Perhaps, to equal you in frankness, I know and embrace my advantage. I am not without the spirit of adventure. I am in a false position—so recognised by public acclamation: do you grudge me, then, my issue?"

"If your mind is made up, why should I dissuade you?" said the Countess. "I own, with a bare face, I am the gainer. Go, you take my heart with you, or more of it than I desire; I shall not sleep at night for thinking of your misery. But do not be afraid; I would not spoil you, you are such a fool and hero."

"Alas! madam," cried the Prince, "and your unlucky money! I did amiss to take it, but you are a wonderful persuader. And I thank God, I can still offer you the fair equivalent." He took some papers from the chimney. "Here, madam, are the title-deeds," he said; "where I am going, they can certainly be of no use to me, and I have now no other hope of making up to you your kindness. You made the loan without formality, obeying your kind heart. The parts are somewhat changed; the sun of this Prince of Grünewald is upon the point of setting; and I know you better than to doubt you will once more waive ceremony, and accept the best that he can give you. If I may look for any pleasure in the coming time, it will be to remember that the peasant is secure, and my most generous friend no loser."

"Do you not understand my odious position?" cried the Countess. "Dear Prince, it is upon your fall that I begin my fortune."

" It was the more like you to tempt me to resistance," returned Otto. " But this cannot alter our relations ; and I must, for the last time, lay my commands upon you in the character of Prince." And with his loftiest dignity, he forced the deeds on her acceptance.

" I hate the very touch of them," she cried.

There followed upon this a little silence. " At what time," resumed Otto, " (if indeed you know) am I to be arrested ? "

" Your Highness, when you please ! " exclaimed the Countess. " Or, if you choose to tear that paper, never ! "

" I would rather it were done quickly," said the Prince. " I shall take but time to leave a letter for the Princess."

" Well," said the Countess, " I have advised you to resist ; at the same time, if you intend to be dumb before your shearers, I must say that I ought to set about arranging your arrest. I offered "—she hesitated—" I offered to manage it, intending, my dear friend—intending, upon my soul, to be of use to you. Well, if you will not profit by my goodwill, then be of use to me ; and as soon as ever you feel ready, go to the Flying Mercury where we met last night. It will be none the worse for you ; and to make it quite plain, it will be better for the rest of us."

" Dear madam, certainly," said Otto. " If I am prepared for the chief evil, I shall not quarrel with details. Go, then, with my best gratitude ; and when I have written a few lines of leave-taking, I shall immediately hasten to keep tryst. To-night I shall not meet so dangerous a cavalier," he added, with a smiling gallantry.

As soon as Madame von Rosen was gone he made a great call upon his self-command. He was face to face with a miserable passage where, if it were possible, he desired to carry himself with dignity. As to the main fact, he never swerved or faltered ; he had come so heart-sick and so cruelly humiliated from his talk with Gotthold, that he embraced the notion of imprisonment with something bordering on relief. Here was, at least, a step which he

thought blameless; here was a way out of his troubles. He sat down to write to Seraphina; and his anger blazed. The tale of his forbearances mounted, in his eyes, to something monstrous; still more monstrous, the coldness, egoism, and cruelty that had required and thus requited them. The pen which he had taken shook in his hand. He was amazed to find his resignation fled, but it was gone beyond his recall. In a few white-hot words, he bade adieu, dubbing desperation by the name of love, and calling his wrath forgiveness; then he cast but one look of leave-taking on the place that had been his for so long and was now to be his no longer; and hurried forth—love's prisoner—or pride's.

He took that private passage which he had trodden so often in less momentous hours. The porter let him out: and the bountiful, cold air of the night and the pure glory of the stars received him on the threshold. He looked round him, breathing deep of earth's plain fragrance; he looked up into the great array of heaven, and was quieted. His little turgid life dwindled to its true proportions; and he saw himself (that great flame-hearted martyr!) stand like a speck under the cool cupola of the night. Thus he felt his careless injuries already soothed; the live air of out-of-doors, the quiet of the world, as if by their silent music, sobering and dwarfing his emotions.

"Well, I forgive her," he said. "If it be of any use to her, I forgive."

And with brisk steps he crossed the garden, issued upon the park, and came to the Flying Mercury. A dark figure moved forward from the shadow of the pedestal.

"I have to ask your pardon, sir," a voice observed, "but if I am right in taking you for the Prince, I was given to understand that you would be prepared to meet me."

"Herr Gordon, I believe?" said Otto.

"Herr Oberst Gordon," replied that officer. "This is rather a ticklish business for a man to be embarked in; and to find that all is to go pleasantly is a great relief to me.

The carriage is at hand ; shall I have the honour of following your Highness ? "

" Colonel," said the Prince, " I have now come to that happy moment of my life when I have orders to receive but none to give."

" A most philosophical remark," returned the Colonel. " Begad, a very pertinent remark ! it might be Plutarch. I am not a drop's blood to your Highness, or indeed to anyone in this principality ; or else I should dislike my orders. But as it is, and since there is nothing unnatural or unbecoming on my side, and your Highness takes it in good part, I begin to believe we may have a capital time together, sir—a capital time. For a gaoler is only a fellow-captive."

" May I inquire, Herr Gordon," asked Otto, " what led you to accept this dangerous and I would fain hope thankless office ? "

" Very natural, I am sure," replied the officer of fortune. " My pay is, in the meanwhile, doubled."

" Well, sir, I will not presume to criticise," returned the Prince. " And I perceive the carriage."

Sure enough, at the intersection of two alleys of the park, a coach and four, conspicuous by its lanterns, stood in waiting. And a little way off about a score of lancers were drawn up under the shadow of the trees.

CHAPTER XIII

PROVIDENCE VON ROSEN: ACT THE THIRD SHE ENLIGHTENS SERAPHINA

When Madame von Rosen left the Prince, she hurried straight to Colonel Gordon; and not content with directing the arrangements, she had herself accompanied the soldier of fortune to the Flying Mercury. The Colonel gave her his arm, and the talk between this pair of conspirators ran high and lively. The Countess, indeed, was in a whirl of pleasure and excitement; her tongue stumbled upon laughter, her eyes shone, the colour that was usually wanting now perfected her face. It would have taken little more to bring Gordon to her feet—or so, at least, she believed, disdaining the idea.

Hidden among some lilac bushes, she enjoyed the great decorum of the arrest, and heard the dialogue of the two men die away along the path. Soon after, the rolling of a carriage and the beat of hoofs arose in the still air of the night, and passed speedily farther and fainter into silence. The Prince was gone.

Madame von Rosen consulted her watch. She had still, she thought, time enough for the tit-bit of her evening; and hurrying to the palace, winged by the fear of Gondremark's arrival, she sent her name and a pressing request for a reception to the Princess Seraphina. As the Countess von Rosen unqualified, she was sure to be refused; but as an emissary of the Baron's, for so she chose to style herself, she gained immediate entry.

The Princess sat alone at table, making a feint of dining. Her cheeks were mottled, her eyes heavy; she had neither

slept nor eaten; even her dress had been neglected. In short, she was out of health, out of looks, out of heart, and hag-ridden by her conscience. The Countess drew a swift comparison, and shone brighter in beauty.

"You come, madam, *de la part de Monsieur le Baron,*" drawled the Princess. "Be seated! What have you to say?"

"To say?" repeated Madame von Rosen. "O, much to say! Much to say that I would rather not, and much to leave unsaid that I would rather say. For I am like St. Paul, your Highness, and always wish to do the things I should not. Well! to be categorical—that is the word?—I took the Prince your order. He could not credit his senses. 'Ah,' he cried, 'dear Madame von Rosen, it is not possible—it cannot be—I must hear it from your lips. My wife is a poor girl misled, she is only silly, she is not cruel.' '*Mon Prince,*' said I, 'a girl—and therefore cruel; youth kills flies.'—He had such pain to understand it!"

"Madame von Rosen," said the Princess, in most steadfast tones, but with a rose of anger in her face, "who sent you here, and for what purpose? Tell your errand."

"O, madam, I believe you understand me very well," returned von Rosen. "I have not your philosophy. I wear my heart upon my sleeve, excuse the indecency! It is a very little one," she laughed, "and I so often change the sleeve!"

"Am I to understand the Prince has been arrested?" asked the Princess, rising.

"While you sat there dining!" cried the Countess, still nonchalantly seated.

"You have discharged your errand," was the reply; "I will not detain you."

"O no, madam," said the Countess, "with your permission, I have not yet done. I have borne much this evening in your service. I have suffered. I was made to suffer in your service." She unfolded her fan as she spoke. Quick as her pulses beat, the fan waved languidly. She

betrayed her emotion only by the brightness of her eyes and face, and by the almost insolent triumph with which she looked down upon the Princess. There were old scores of rivalry between them in more than one field; so at least von Rosen felt; and now she was to have her hour of victory in them all.

"You are no servant, Madame von Rosen, of mine," said Seraphina.

"No, madam, indeed," returned the Countess; "but we both serve the same person, as you know—or if you do not, then I have the pleasure of informing you. Your conduct is so light—so light," she repeated, the fan wavering higher like a butterfly, "that perhaps you do not truly understand." The Countess rolled her fan together, laid it in her lap, and rose to a less languorous position. "Indeed," she continued, "I should be sorry to see any young woman in your situation. You began with every advantage—birth, a suitable marriage—quite pretty too—and see what you have come to! My poor girl! to think of it! But there is nothing that does so much harm," observed the Countess finely, "as giddiness of mind." And she once more unfurled the fan, and approvingly fanned herself.

"I will no longer permit you to forget yourself," cried Seraphina. "I think you are mad."

"Not mad," returned von Rosen. "Sane enough to know you dare not break with me to-night, and to profit by the knowledge. I left my poor, pretty Prince Charming crying his eyes out for a wooden doll. My heart is soft; I love my pretty Prince; you will never understand it, but I long to give my Prince his doll, dry his poor eyes, and send him off happy. O, you immature fool!" the Countess cried, rising to her feet, and pointing at the Princess the closed fan that now began to tremble in her hand. "O wooden doll!" she cried, "have you a heart, or blood, or any nature? This is a man, child—a man who loves you. O, it will not happen twice! it is not common; beautiful

and clever women look in vain for it. And you, you pitiful school-girl, tread this jewel under foot! you, stupid with your vanity! Before you try to govern kingdoms you should first be able to behave yourself at home; home is the woman's kingdom." She paused and laughed a little, strangely to hear and look upon. "I will tell you one of the things," she said, "that were to stay unspoken. Von Rosen is a better woman than you, my Princess, though you will never have the pain of understanding it; and when I took the Prince your order, and looked upon his face, my soul was melted—O, I am frank—here, within my arms, I offered him repose!" She advanced a step superbly as she spoke, with outstretched arms; and Seraphina shrank. "Do not be alarmed!" the Countess cried; "I am not offering that hermitage to you; in all the world there is but one who wants to, and him you have dismissed! 'If it will give her pleasure I should wear the martyr's crown,' he cried, 'I will embrace the thorns.' I tell you—I am quite frank—I put the order in his power and begged him to resist. You, who have betrayed your husband, may betray me to Gondremark; my Prince would betray no one. Understand it plainly," she cried, "'tis of his pure forbearance you sit there; he had the power—I gave it him—to change the parts; and he refused, and went to prison in your place."

The Princess spoke with some distress. "Your violence shocks me and pains me," she began, "but I cannot be angry with what at least does honour to the mistaken kindness of your heart: it was right for me to know this. I will condescend to tell you. It was with deep regret that I was driven to this step. I admire in many ways the Prince—I admit his amiability. It was our great misfortune, it was perhaps somewhat of my fault, that we were so unsuited to each other; but I have a regard, a sincere regard, for all his qualities. As a private person I should think as you do. It is difficult, I know, to make allowances for state considerations. I have only with

deep reluctance obeyed the call of a superior duty; and so soon as I dare do it for the safety of the state, I promise you the Prince shall be released. Many in my situation would have resented your freedoms. I am not"—and she looked for a moment rather piteously upon the Countess—"I am not altogether so inhuman as you think."

"And you can put these troubles of the state," the Countess cried, "to weigh with a man's love?"

"Madame von Rosen, these troubles are affairs of life and death to many; to the Prince, and perhaps even to yourself, among the number," replied the Princess, with dignity. "I have learned, madam, although still so young, in a hard school, that my own feelings must everywhere come last."

"O callow innocence!" exclaimed the other. "Is it possible you do not know, or do not suspect, the intrigue in which you move? I find it in my heart to pity you! We are both women after all—poor girl, poor girl!—and who is born a woman is born a fool. And though I hate all women—come, for the common folly, I forgive you. Your Highness"—she dropped a deep stage curtsey and resumed her fan—"I am going to insult you, to betray one who is called my lover, and, if it pleases you to use the power I now put unreservedly into your hands, to ruin my dear self. O what a French comedy! You betray, I betray, they betray. It is now my cue. The letter, yes. Behold the letter, madam, its seal unbroken as I found it by my bed this morning; for I was out of humour, and I get many, too many, of these favours. For your own sake, for the sake of my Prince Charming, for the sake of this great principality that sits so heavy on your conscience, open it and read!"

"Am I to understand," inquired the Princess, "that this letter in any way regards me?"

"You see I have not opened it," replied von Rosen; "but 'tis mine, and I beg you to experiment."

"I cannot look at it till you have," returned Seraphina,

very seriously. "There may be matter there not meant for me to see; it is a private letter."

The Countess tore it open, glanced it through, and tossed it back; and the Princess, taking up the sheet, recognised the hand of Gondremark, and read with a sickening shock the following lines :—

"Dearest Anna, come at once. Ratafia has done the deed, her husband is to be packed to prison. This puts the minx entirely in my power; *le tour est joué;* she will now go steady in harness, or I will know the reason why. Come.

"HEINRICH."

"Command yourself, madam," said the Countess, watching with some alarm the white face of Seraphina. "It is in vain for you to fight with Gondremark; he has more strings than mere court favour, and could bring you down to-morrow with a word. I would not have betrayed him otherwise; but Heinrich is a man, and plays with all of you like marionettes. And now at least you see for what you sacrificed my Prince. Madam, will you take some wine? I have been cruel."

"Not cruel, madam—salutary," said Seraphina, with a phantom smile. "No, I thank you, I require no attentions. The first surprise affected me: will you give me time a little? I must think."

She took her head between her hands and contemplated for a while the hurricane confusion of her thoughts.

"This information reaches me," she said, "when I have need of it. I would not do as you have done, but yet I thank you. I have been much deceived in Baron Gondremark."

"O, madam, leave Gondremark, and think upon the Prince!" cried von Rosen.

"You speak once more as a private person," said the Princess; "nor do I blame you. But my own thoughts are more distracted. However, as I believe you are truly a friend to my—to the——as I believe," she said, "you

are a friend to Otto, I shall put the order for his release into your hands this moment. Give me the ink-dish. There!" And she wrote hastily, steadying her arm upon the table, for she trembled like a reed. "Remember, madam," she resumed, handing her the order, "this must not be used nor spoken of at present; till I have seen the Baron, any hurried step—I lose myself in thinking. The suddenness has shaken me."

"I promise you I will not use it," said the Countess, "till you give me leave, although I wish the Prince could be informed of it, to comfort his poor heart. And O, I had forgotten, he has left a letter. Suffer me, madam; I will bring it you. This is the door, I think?" And she sought to open it.

"The bolt is pushed," said Seraphina, flushing.

"O! O!" cried the Countess.

A silence fell between them.

"I will get it for myself," said Seraphina; "and in the meanwhile I beg you to leave me. I thank you, I am sure, but I shall be obliged if you will leave me."

The Countess deeply curtseyed, and withdrew.

CHAPTER XIV

RELATES THE CAUSE AND OUTBREAK OF THE REVOLUTION

Brave as she was, and brave by intellect, the Princess, when first she was alone, clung to the table for support. The four corners of her universe had fallen. She had never liked nor trusted Gondremark completely; she had still held it possible to find him false to friendship; but from that to finding him devoid of all those public virtues for which she had honoured him, a mere commonplace intriguer, using her for his own ends, the step was wide and the descent giddy. Light and darkness succeeded each other in her brain; now she believed, and now she could not. She turned, blindly groping for the note. But von Rosen, who had not forgotten to take the warrant from the Prince, had remembered to recover her note from the Princess: von Rosen was an old campaigner, whose most violent emotion aroused rather than clouded the vigour of her reason.

The thought recalled to Seraphina the remembrance of the other letter—Otto's. She rose and went speedily, her brain still wheeling, and burst into the Prince's armoury. The old chamberlain was there in waiting; and the sight of another face, prying (or so she felt) on her distress, struck Seraphina into childish anger.

"Go!" she cried; and then, when the old man was already half-way to the door, "Stay!" she added. "As soon as Baron Gondremark arrives, let him attend me here."

"It shall be so directed," said the chamberlain.

"There was a letter . . ." she began, and paused.

"Her Highness," said the chamberlain, "will find a letter on the table. I had received no orders, or her Highness had been spared this trouble."

"No, no, no," she cried. "I thank you. I desire to be alone."

And then, when he was gone, she leaped upon the letter. Her mind was still obscured; like the moon upon a night of clouds and wind, her reason shone and was darkened, and she read the words by flashes.

"Seraphina," the Prince wrote, "I will write no syllable of reproach. I have seen your order, and I go. What else is left me? I have wasted my love, and have no more. To say that I forgive you is not needful: at least, we are now separate for ever; by your own act, you free me from my willing bondage: I go free to prison. This is the last that you will hear of me in love or anger. I have gone out of your life; you may breathe easy; you have now rid yourself of the husband who allowed you to desert him, of the Prince who gave you his rights, and of the married lover who made it his pride to defend you in your absence. How you have requited him, your own heart more loudly tells you than my words. There is a day coming when your vain dreams will roll away like clouds, and you will find yourself alone. Then you will remember

"Otto."

She read with a great horror on her mind; that day, of which he wrote, was come. She was alone; she had been false, she had been cruel; remorse rolled in upon her; and then with a more piercing note, vanity bounded on the stage of consciousness. She a dupe! she helpless! she to have betrayed herself in seeking to betray her husband! she to have lived these years upon flattery, grossly swallowing the bolus, like a clown with sharpers! she—Seraphina! Her swift mind drank the consequences; she foresaw the coming fall, her public shame; she saw the odium, disgrace, and folly of her story flaunt through Europe. She recalled the scandal she had so royally braved; and, alas! she had now no courage to confront it with. To be thought the mistress of that man: perhaps

for that. . . . She closed her eyes on agonising vistas. Swift as thought she had snatched a bright dagger from the weapons that shone along the wall. Ay, she would escape. From that world-wide theatre of nodding heads and buzzing whisperers, in which she now beheld herself unpitiably martyred, one door stood open. At any cost, through any stress of suffering, that greasy laughter should be stifled. She closed her eyes, breathed a wordless prayer, and pressed the weapon to her bosom.

At the astonishing sharpness of the prick, she gave a cry and awoke to a sense of undeserved escape. A little ruby spot of blood was the reward of that great act of desperation ; but the pain had braced her like a tonic, and her whole design of suicide had passed away.

At the same instant regular feet drew near along the gallery, and she knew the tread of the big Baron, so often gladly welcome, and even now rallying her spirits like a call to battle. She concealed the dagger in the folds of her skirt ; and drawing her stature up, she stood firm-footed, radiant with anger, waiting for the foe.

The Baron was announced, and entered. To him, Seraphina was a hated task : like the schoolboy with his Virgil, he had neither will nor leisure to remark her beauties ; but when he now beheld her standing illuminated by her passion, new feelings flashed upon him, a frank admiration, a brief sparkle of desire. He noted both with joy ; they were means. " If I have to play the lover," thought he, for that was his constant preoccupation, " I believe I can put soul into it." Meanwhile, with his usual ponderous grace, he bent before the lady.

" I propose," she said in a strange voice, not known to her till then, " that we release the Prince and do not prosecute the war."

" Ah, madam," he replied, " 'tis as I knew it would be ! Your heart, I knew, would wound you when we came to this distasteful but most necessary step. Ah, madam, believe me, I am not unworthy to be your ally ; I know

you have qualities to which I am a stranger, and count them the best weapons in the armoury of our alliance:—the girl in the queen—pity, love, tenderness, laughter; the smile that can reward. I can only command; I am the frowner. But you! And you have the fortitude to command these comely weaknesses, to tread them down at the call of reason. How often have I not admired it even to yourself! Ay, even to yourself," he added tenderly, dwelling, it seemed, in memory on hours of more private admiration. "But now, madam——"

"But now, Herr von Gondremark, the time for these declarations has gone by," she cried. "Are you true to me? are you false? Look in your heart and answer: it is your heart I want to know."

"It has come," thought Gondremark. "You, madam!" he cried, starting back—with fear, you would have said, and yet a timid joy. "You! yourself, you bid me look into my heart?"

"Do you suppose I fear?" she cried, and looked at him with such a heightened colour, such bright eyes, and a smile of so abstruse a meaning that the Baron discarded his last doubt.

"Ah, madam!" he cried, plumping on his knees. "Seraphina! Do you permit me? have you divined my secret? It is true—I put my life with joy into your power—I love you, love with ardour, as an equal, as a mistress, as a brother-in-arms, as an adored, desired, sweet-hearted woman. O Bride!" he cried, waxing dithyrambic, "bride of my reason and my senses, have pity, have pity on my love!"

She heard him with wonder, rage, and then contempt. His words offended her to sickness; his appearance, as he grovelled bulkily upon the floor, moved her to such laughter as we laugh in nightmares

"O shame!" she cried. "Absurd and odious! What would the Countess say?"

That great Baron Gondremark, the excellent politician,

remained for some little time upon his knees in a frame of mind which perhaps we are allowed to pity. His vanity, within his iron bosom, bled and raved. If he could have blotted all, if he could have withdrawn part, if he had not called her bride—with a roaring in his ears, he thus regretfully reviewed his declaration. He got to his feet tottering; and then, in that first moment when a dumb agony finds a vent in words, and the tongue betrays the inmost and worst of a man, he permitted himself a retort which, for six weeks to follow, he was to repent at leisure.

"Ah," said he, "the Countess? Now I perceive the reason of your Highness's disorder."

The lackey-like insolence of the words was driven home by a more insolent manner. There fell upon Seraphina one of those storm-clouds which had already blackened upon her reason; she heard herself cry out; and when the cloud dispersed, flung the blood-stained dagger on the floor, and saw Gondremark reeling back with open mouth and clapping his hand upon the wound. The next moment, with oaths that she had never heard, he leaped at her in savage passion; clutched her as she recoiled; and in the very act, stumbled and drooped. She had scarce time to fear his murderous onslaught ere he fell before her feet.

He rose upon one elbow; she still staring upon him, white with horror.

"Anna!" he cried, "Anna! Help!"

And then his utterance failed him, and he fell back, to all appearance dead.

Seraphina ran to and fro in the room; she wrung her hands and cried aloud; within she was all one uproar of terror, and conscious of no articulate wish but to awake.

There came a knocking at the door; and she sprang to it and held it, panting like a beast, and with the strength of madness in her arms, till she had pushed the bolt. At this success a certain calm fell upon her reason. She went back and looked upon her victim, the knocking growing louder. O yes, he was dead. She had killed him. He had

called upon von Rosen with his latest breath; ah! who would call on Seraphina? She had killed him. She, whose irresolute hand could scarce prick blood from her own bosom, had found strength to cast down that great colossus at a blow.

All this while the knocking was growing more uproarious and more unlike the staid career of life in such a palace. Scandal was at the door, with what a fatal following she dreaded to conceive; and at the same time among the voices that now began to summon her by name, she recognised the Chancellor's. He or another, somebody must be the first.

"Is Herr von Greisengesang without?" she called.

"Your Highness—yes!" the old gentleman answered. "We have heard cries, a fall. Is anything amiss?"

"Nothing," replied Seraphina. "I desire to speak with you. Send off the rest." She panted between each phrase; but her mind was clear. She let the looped curtain down upon both sides before she drew the bolt; and, thus secure from any sudden eyeshot from without, admitted the obsequious Chancellor, and again made fast the door.

Greisengesang clumsily revolved among the wings of the curtain; so that she was clear of it as soon as he.

"My God!" he cried. "The Baron!"

"I have killed him," she said. "O, killed him!"

"Dear me," said the old gentleman, "this is most unprecedented. Lovers' quarrels," he added ruefully, "redintegratio——" and then paused. "But, my dear madam," he broke out again, "in the name of all that is practical, what are we to do? This is exceedingly grave; morally, madam, it is appalling. I take the liberty, your Highness, for one moment, of addressing you as a daughter, a loved although respected daughter; and I must say that I cannot conceal from you that this is morally most questionable. And, O dear me, we have a dead body."

She had watched him closely; hope fell to contempt;

she drew away her skirts from his weakness, and, in the act, her own strength returned to her.

"See if he be dead," she said; not one word of explanation or defence; she had scorned to justify herself before so poor a creature: "See if he be dead" was all.

With the greatest compunction, the Chancellor drew near; and as he did so the wounded Baron rolled his eyes.

"He lives," cried the old courtier, turning effusively to Seraphina. "Madam, he still lives."

"Help him, then," returned the Princess, standing fixed. "Bind up his wound."

"Madam, I have no means," protested the Chancellor.

"Can you not take your handkerchief, your neckcloth, anything?" she cried; and at the same moment, from her light muslin gown she rent off a flounce and tossed it on the floor. "Take that," she said, and for the first time directly faced Greisengesang.

But the Chancellor held up his hands and turned away his head in agony. The grasp of the falling Baron had torn down the dainty fabric of the bodice; and—"O Highness!" cried Greisengesang, appalled, "the terrible disorder of your toilette!"

"Take up that flounce," she said; "the man may die."

Greisengesang turned in a flutter to the Baron, and attempted some innocent and bungling measures. "He still breathes," he kept saying. "All is not yet over; he is not yet gone."

"And now," said she, "if that is all you can do, begone and get some porters; he must instantly go home."

"Madam," cried the Chancellor, "if this most melancholy sight was seen in town—O dear, the state would fall!" he piped.

"There is a litter in the palace," she replied. "It is your part to see him safe. I lay commands upon you. On your life it stands."

"I see it, dear Highness," he jerked. "Clearly I see it. But how? what men? The Prince's servants—

yes. They had a personal affection. They will be true, if any."

"O, not them!" she cried. "Take Sabra, my own man."

"Sabra! The grand-mason?" returned the Chancellor, aghast. "If he but saw this, he would sound the tocsin—we should all be butchered."

She measured the depth of her abasement steadily. "Take whom you must," she said, "and bring the litter here."

Once she was alone she ran to the Baron, and with a sickening heart sought to allay the flux of blood. The touch of the skin of that great charlatan revolted her to the toes; the wound, in her ignorant eyes, looked deathly; yet she contended with her shuddering, and, with more skill at least than the Chancellor's, staunched the welling injury. An eye unprejudiced with hate would have admired the Baron in his swoon; he looked so great and shapely; it was so powerful a machine that lay arrested; and his features, cleared for the moment both of temper and dissimulation, were seen to be so purely modelled. But it was not thus with Seraphina. Her victim, as he lay outspread, twitching a little, his big chest unbared, fixed her with his ugliness; and her mind flitted for a glimpse to Otto.

Rumours began to sound about the palace of feet running and of voices raised; the echoes of the great arched staircase were voluble of some confusion; and then the gallery jarred with a quick and heavy tramp. It was the Chancellor, followed by four of Otto's valets and a litter. The servants, when they were admitted, stared at the dishevelled Princess and the wounded man; speech was denied them, but their thoughts were riddled with profanity. Gondremark was bundled in; the curtains of the litter were lowered; the bearers carried it forth, and the Chancellor followed behind with a white face.

Seraphina ran to the window. Pressing her face upon

the pane, she could see the terrace, where the lights contended; thence, the avenue of lamps that joined the palace and town; and overhead the hollow night and the larger stars. Presently the small procession issued from the palace, crossed the parade, and began to thread the glittering alley: the swinging couch with its four porters, the much-pondering Chancellor behind. She watched them dwindle with strange thoughts: her eyes fixed upon the scene, her mind still glancing right and left on the overthrow of her life and hopes. There was no one left in whom she might confide; none whose hand was friendly, or on whom she dared to reckon for the barest loyalty. With the fall of Gondremark, her party, her brief popularity, had fallen. So she sat crouched upon the window-seat, her brow to the cool pane; her dress in tatters, barely shielding her; her mind revolving bitter thoughts.

Meanwhile, consequences were fast mounting; and in the deceptive quiet of the night, downfall and red revolt were brewing. The litter had passed forth between the iron gates and entered on the streets of the town. By what flying panic, by what thrill of air communicated, who shall say? but the passing bustle in the palace had already reached and re-echoed in the region of the burghers. Rumour, with her loud whisper, hissed about the town; men left their homes without knowing why; knots formed along the boulevard; under the rare lamps and the great limes the crowd grew blacker.

And now through the midst of that expectant company, the unusual sight of a closed litter was observed approaching, and trotting hard behind it that great dignitary Cancellarius Greisengesang. Silence looked on as it went by; and as soon as it was passed, the whispering seethed over like a boiling pot. The knots were sundered; and gradually, one following another, the whole mob began to form into a procession and escort the curtained litter. Soon spokesmen, a little bolder than their mates, began to ply the Chancellor with questions. Never had he more

need of that great art of falsehood, by whose exercise he had so richly lived. And yet now he stumbled, the master passion, fear, betraying him. He was pressed ; he became incoherent ; and then from the jolting litter came a groan. In the instant hubbub and the gathering of the crowd as to a natural signal, the clear-eyed, quavering Chancellor heard the catch of the clock before it strikes the hour of doom ; and for ten seconds he forgot himself. This shall atone for many sins. He plucked a bearer by the sleeve. " Bid the Princess flee. All is lost," he whispered. And the next moment he was babbling for his life among the multitude.

Five minutes later the wild-eyed servant burst into the armoury. " All is lost ! " he cried. " The Chancellor bids you flee." And at the same time, looking through the window, Seraphina saw the black rush of the populace begin to invade the lamplit avenue.

" Thank you, Georg," she said. " I thank you. Go." And as the man still lingered, " I bid you go," she added. " Save yourself."

Down by the private passage, and just some two hours later, Amalia Seraphina, the last Princess, followed Otto Johann Friedrich, the last Prince of Grünewald.

BOOK III

FORTUNATE MISFORTUNE

CHAPTER I

PRINCESS CINDERELLA

The porter, drawn by the growing turmoil, had vanished from the postern, and the door stood open on the darkness of the night. As Seraphina fled up the terraces, the cries and loud footing of the mob drew nearer the doomed palace; the rush was like the rush of cavalry; the sound of shattering lamps tingled above the rest; and, over-towering all, she heard her own name bandied among the shouters. A bugle sounded at the door of the guard-room; one gun was fired; and then, with the yell of hundreds, Mittwalden Palace was carried at a rush.

Sped by these dire sounds and voices, the Princess scaled the long garden, skimming like a bird the starlit stairways; crossed the park, which was in that place narrow; and plunged upon the farther side into the rude shelter of the forest. So, at a bound, she left the discretion and the cheerful lamps of palace evenings; ceased utterly to be a sovereign lady; and, falling from the whole height of civilisation, ran forth into the woods, a ragged Cinderella.

She went direct before her through an open tract of the forest, full of brush and birches, and where the starlight guided her; and, beyond that again, must thread the columned blackness of a pine grove joining overhead the thatch of its long branches. At that hour the place was breathless; a horror of night like a presence occupied that dungeon of the wood; and she went groping, knocking against the boles—her ear, betweenwhiles, strained to aching and yet unrewarded.

But the slope of the ground was upward, and encouraged her; and presently she issued on a rocky hill that stood forth above the sea of forest. All around were other hill-tops, big and little; sable vales of forest between; overhead the open heaven and the brilliancy of countless stars; and along the western sky the dim forms of mountains. The glory of the great night laid hold upon her; her eyes shone with stars; she dipped her sight into the coolness and brightness of the sky, as she might have dipped her wrist into a spring; and her heart, at that ethereal shock, began to move more soberly. The sun that sails overhead, ploughing into gold the fields of daylight azure and uttering the signal to man's myriads, has no word apart for man the individual; and the moon, like a violin, only praises and laments our private destiny. The stars alone, cheerful whisperers, confer quietly with each of us like friends; they give ear to our sorrows smilingly, like wise old men, rich in tolerance; and by their double scale, so small to the eye, so vast to the imagination, they keep before the mind the double character of man's nature and fate.

There sat the Princess, beautifully looking upon beauty, in council with these glad advisers. Bright like pictures, clear like a voice in the porches of her ear, memory re-enacted the tumult of the evening: the Countess and the dancing fan, the big Baron on his knees, the blood on the polished floor, the knocking, the swing of the litter down the avenue of lamps, the messenger, the cries of the charging mob; and yet all were far away and phantasmal, and she was still healingly conscious of the peace and glory of the night. She looked towards Mittwalden; and above the hill-top, which already hid it from her view, a throbbing redness hinted of fire. Better so: better so, that she should fall with tragic greatness, lit by a blazing palace! She felt not a trace of pity for Gondremark or of concern for Grünewald: that period of her life was closed for ever, a wrench of wounded vanity alone surviving. She had but

one clear idea: to flee; —and another, obscure and half-rejected, although still obeyed: to flee in the direction of the Felsenburg. She had a duty to perform, she must free Otto—so her mind said, very coldly; but her heart embraced the notion of that duty even with ardour, and her hands began to yearn for the grasp of kindness.

She rose, with a start of recollection, and plunged down the slope into the covert. The woods received and closed upon her. Once more, she wandered and hasted in a blot, uncheered, unpiloted. Here and there, indeed, through rents in the wood-roof, a glimmer attracted her; here and there a tree stood out among its neighbours by some force of outline; here and there a brushing among the leaves, a notable blackness, a dim shine, relieved, only to exaggerate, the solid oppression of the night and silence. And betweenwhiles, the unfeatured darkness would redouble and the whole ear of night appear to be gloating on her steps. Now she would stand still, and the silence would grow and grow, till it weighed upon her breathing; and then she would address herself again to run, stumbling, falling, and still hurrying the more. And presently the whole wood rocked and began to run along with her. The noise of her own mad passage through the silence spread and echoed, and filled the night with terror. Panic hunted her: Panic from the trees reached forth with clutching branches; the darkness was lit up and peopled with strange forms and faces. She strangled and fled before her fears. And yet in the last fortress, reason, blown upon by these gusts of terror, still shone with a troubled light. She knew, yet could not act upon her knowledge; she knew that she must stop, and yet she still ran.

She was already near madness, when she broke suddenly into a narrow clearing. At the same time the din grew louder, and she became conscious of vague forms and fields of whiteness. And with that the earth gave way; she fell and found her feet again with an incredible shock to her senses, and her mind was swallowed up.

When she came again to herself she was standing to the mid-leg in an icy eddy of a brook, and leaning with one hand on the rock from which it poured. The spray had wet her hair. She saw the white cascade, the stars wavering in the shaken pool, foam flitting, and high overhead the tall pines on either hand serenely drinking starshine ; and in the sudden quiet of her spirit she heard with joy the firm plunge of the cataract in the pool. She scrambled forth dripping. In the face of her proved weakness, to adventure again upon the horror of blackness in the groves were a suicide of life or reason. But here, in the alley of the brook, with the kind stars above her, and the moon presently swimming into sight, she could await the coming of day without alarm.

This lane of pine-trees ran very rapidly down hill and wound among the woods ; but it was a wider thoroughfare than the brook needed, and here and there were little dimpling lawns and coves of the forest, where the starshine slumbered. Such a lawn she paced, taking patience bravely ; and now she looked up the hill and saw the brook coming down to her in a series of cascades ; and now approached the margin, where it welled among the rushes silently ; and now gazed at the great company of heaven with an enduring wonder. The early evening had fallen chill, but the night was now temperate ; out of the recesses of the wood there came mild airs as from a deep and peaceful breathing ; and the dew was heavy on the grass and the tight-shut daisies. This was the girl's first night under the naked heaven ; and now that her fears were overpast, she was touched to the soul by its serene amenity and peace. Kindly the host of heaven blinked down upon that wandering Princess ; and the honest brook had no words but to encourage her.

At last she began to be aware of a wonderful revolution, compared to which the fire of Mittwalden Palace was but the crack and flash of a percussion-cap. The countenance with which the pines regarded her began insensibly to

change; the grass too, short as it was, and the whole winding staircase of the brook's course, began to wear a solemn freshness of appearance. And this slow transfiguration reached her heart, and played upon it, and transpierced it with a serious thrill. She looked all about; the whole face of nature looked back, brimful of meaning, finger on lip, leaking its glad secret. She looked up. Heaven was almost emptied of stars. Such as still lingered shone with a changed and waning brightness, and began to faint in their stations. And the colour of the sky itself was the most wonderful; for the rich blue of the night had now melted and softened and brightened; and there had succeeded in its place a hue that has no name, and that is never seen but as the herald of morning. "O!" she cried, joy catching at her voice, "O! it is the dawn!"

In a breath she passed over the brook, and looped up her skirts and fairly ran in the dim alleys. As she ran, her ears were aware of many pipings, more beautiful than music; in the small dish-shaped houses in the fork of giant arms, where they had lain all night, lover by lover, warmly pressed, the bright-eyed, big-hearted singers began to awaken for the day. Her heart melted and flowed forth to them in kindness. And they, from their small and high perches in the clerestories of the wood cathedral, peered down sidelong at the ragged Princess as she flitted below them on the carpet of the moss and tassel.

Soon she had struggled to a certain hill-top, and saw far before her the silent inflooding of the day. Out of the East it welled and whitened; the darkness trembled into light; and the stars were extinguished like the street-lamps of a human city. The whiteness brightened into silver, the silver warmed into gold, the gold kindled into pure and living fire; and the face of the East was barred with elemental scarlet. The day drew its first long breath, steady and chill; and for leagues around the woods sighed and shivered. And then, at one bound, the sun had floated up; and her startled eyes received day's first

arrow, and quailed under the buffet. On every side, the shadows leaped from their ambush and fell prone. The day was come, plain and garish; and up the steep and solitary eastern heaven, the sun, victorious over his competitors, continued slowly and royally to mount.

Seraphina drooped for a little, leaning on a pine, the shrill joy of the woodlands mocking her. The shelter of the night, the thrilling and joyous changes of the dawn, were over; and now, in the hot eye of the day, she turned uneasily and looked sighingly about her. Some way off among the lower woods a pillar of smoke was mounting and melting in the gold and blue. There, surely enough, were human folk, the hearth-surrounders. Man's fingers had laid the twigs; it was man's breath that had quickened and encouraged the baby flames; and now, as the fire caught, it would be playing ruddily on the face of its creator. At the thought, she felt a-cold and little and lost in that great out-of-doors. The electric shock of the young sunbeams and the unhuman beauty of the woods began to irk and daunt her. The covert of the house, the decent privacy of rooms, the swept and regulated fire, all that denotes or beautifies the home life of man, began to draw her as with cords. The pillar of smoke was now risen into some stream of moving air; it began to lean out sideways in a pennon; and thereupon, as though the change had been a summons, Seraphina plunged once more into the labyrinth of the wood.

She left day upon the high ground. In the lower groves there still lingered the blue early twilight and the seizing freshness of the dew. But here and there, above this field of shadow, the head of a great outspread pine was already glorious with day; and here and there, through the breaches of the hills, the sunbeams made a great and luminous entry. Here Seraphina hastened along forest paths. She had lost sight of the pilot smoke, which blew another way, and conducted herself in that great wilderness by the direction of the sun. But presently fresh signs

bespoke the neighbourhood of man; felled trunks, white slivers from the axe, bundles of green boughs, and stacks of firewood. These guided her forward; until she came forth at last upon the clearing whence the smoke arose. A hut stood in the clear shadow, hard by a brook which made a series of inconsiderable falls; and on the threshold the Princess saw a sun-burnt and hard-featured woodman, standing with his hands behind his back and gazing skyward.

She went to him directly; a beautiful, bright-eyed, and haggard vision; splendidly arrayed and pitifully tattered; the diamond ear-drops still glittering in her ears; and with the movement of her coming, one small breast showing and hiding among the ragged covert of the laces. At that ambiguous hour, and coming as she did from the great silence of the forest, the man drew back from the Princess as from something elfin.

"I am cold," she said, "and weary. Let me rest beside your fire."

The woodman was visibly commoved, but answered nothing.

"I will pay," she said, and then repented of the words, catching perhaps a spark of terror from his frightened eyes. But, as usual, her courage rekindled brighter for the check. She put him from the door and entered; and he followed her in superstitious wonder.

Within, the hut was rough and dark; but on the stone that served as hearth, twigs and a few dry branches burned with the brisk sounds and all the variable beauty of fire. The very sight of it composed her; she crouched hard by on the earth floor and shivered in the glow, and looked upon the eating blaze with admiration. The woodman was still staring at his guest; at the wreck of the rich dress, the bare arms, the bedraggled laces and the gems. He found no word to utter.

"Give me food," said she,—"here, by the fire."

He set down a pitcher of coarse wine, bread, a piece of

cheese, and a handful of raw onions. The bread was hard and sour, the cheese like leather; even the onion, which ranks with the truffle and the nectarine in the chief place of honour of earth's fruits, is not perhaps a dish for princesses when raw. But she ate, if not with appetite, with courage; and when she had eaten, did not disdain the pitcher. In all her life before, she had not tasted of gross food nor drunk after another; but a brave woman far more readily accepts a change of circumstances than the bravest man. All that while, the woodman continued to observe her furtively, many low thoughts of fear and greed contending in his eyes. She read them clearly, and she knew she must be gone.

Presently she arose and offered him a florin.

"Will that repay you?" she asked.

But here the man found his tongue. "I must have more than that," said he.

"It is all I have to give you," she returned, and passed him by serenely.

Yet her heart trembled, for she saw his hand stretched forth as if to arrest her, and his unsteady eyes wandering to his axe. A beaten path led westward from the clearing, and she swiftly followed it. She did not glance behind her. But as soon as the least turning of the path had concealed her from the woodman's eyes, she slipped among the trees and ran till she deemed herself in safety.

By this time the strong sunshine pierced in a thousand places the pine-thatch of the forest, fired the red boles, irradiated the cool aisles of shadow, and burned in jewels on the grass. The gum of these trees was dearer to the senses than the gums of Araby; each pine, in the lusty morning sunlight, burned its own wood-incense; and now and then a breeze would rise and toss these rooted censers, and send shade and sun-gem flitting, swift as swallows, thick as bees; and wake a brushing bustle of sounds that murmured and went by.

On she passed, and up and down, in sun and shadow;

now aloft on the bare ridge among the rocks and birches, with the lizards and the snakes; and anon in the deep grove among sunless pillars. Now she followed wandering wood-paths, in the maze of valleys; and again, from a hill-top, beheld the distant mountains and the great birds circling under the sky. She would see afar off a nestling hamlet, and go round to avoid it. Below, she traced the course of the foam of mountain torrents. Nearer hand, she saw where the tender springs welled up in silence, or oozed in green moss; or in the more favoured hollows a whole family of infant rivers would combine, and tinkle in the stones, and lie in pools to be a bathing-place for sparrows, or fall from the sheer rock in rods of crystal. Upon all these things, as she still sped along in the bright air, she looked with a rapture of surprise and a joyful fainting of the heart; they seemed so novel, they touched so strangely home, they were so hued and scented, they were so beset and canopied by the dome of the blue air of heaven.

At length, when she was well weary, she came upon a wide and shallow pool. Stones stood in it, like islands; bulrushes fringed the coast; the floor was paved with the pine needles; and the pines themselves, whose roots made promontories, looked down silently on their green images. She crept to the margin and beheld herself with wonder, a hollow- and bright-eyed phantom, in the ruins of her palace robe. The breeze now shook her image; now it would be marred with flies; and at that she smiled; and from the fading circles, her counterpart smiled back to her and looked kind. She sat long in the warm sun, and pitied her bare arms that were all bruised and marred with falling, and marvelled to see that she was dirty, and could not grow to believe that she had gone so long in such a strange disorder.

Then, with a sigh, she addressed herself to make a toilet by that forest mirror, washed herself pure from all the stains of her adventure, took off her jewels and wrapped

them in her handkerchief, re-arranged the tatters of her dress, and took down the folds of her hair. She shook it round her face, and the pool repeated her thus veiled. Her hair had smelt like violets, she remembered Otto saying; and so now she tried to smell it, and then shook her head, and laughed a little, sadly, to herself.

The laugh was returned upon her in a childish echo. She looked up; and lo! two children looking on,—a small girl and a yet smaller boy, standing, like playthings, by the pool, below a spreading pine. Seraphina was not fond of children, and now she was startled to the heart.

"Who are you?" she cried hoarsely.

The mites huddled together and drew back; and Seraphina's heart reproached her that she should have frightened things so quaint and little, and yet alive with senses. She thought upon the birds and looked again at her two visitors; so little larger and so far more innocent. On their clear faces, as in a pool, she saw the reflection of their fears. With gracious purpose she arose.

"Come," she said, "do not be afraid of me," and took a step towards them.

But alas! at the first moment the two poor babes in the wood turned and ran helter-skelter from the Princess.

The most desolate pang was struck into the girl's heart. Here she was, twenty-two—soon twenty-three—and not a creature loved her; none but Otto; and would even he forgive? If she began weeping in these woods alone, it would mean death or madness. Hastily she trod the thoughts out like a burning paper; hastily rolled up her locks, and with terror dogging her, and her whole bosom sick with grief, resumed her journey.

Past ten in the forenoon, she struck a high-road, marching in that place uphill between two stately groves, a river of sunlight; and here, dead weary, careless of consequences, and taking some courage from the human and civilised neighbourhood of the road, she stretched herself on the green margin in the shadow of a tree. Sleep closed

on her, at first with a horror of fainting, but when she ceased to struggle, kindly embracing her. So she was taken home for a little, from all her toils and sorrows, to her Father's arms. And there in the meanwhile her body lay exposed by the highwayside, in tattered finery; and on either hand from the woods the birds came flying by and calling upon others, and debated in their own tongue this strange appearance.

The sun pursued his journey; the shadow flitted from her feet, shrank higher and higher, and was upon the point of leaving her altogether, when the rumble of a coach was signalled to and fro by the birds. The road in that part was very steep; the rumble drew near with great deliberation; and ten minutes passed before a gentleman appeared, walking with a sober elderly gait upon the grassy margin of the highway, and looking pleasantly around him as he walked. From time to time he paused, took out his note-book and made an entry with a pencil; and any spy who had been near enough would have heard him mumbling words as though he were a poet testing verses. The voice of the wheels was still faint, and it was plain the traveller had far outstripped his carriage.

He had drawn very near to where the Princess lay asleep, before his eye alighted on her; but when it did he started, pocketed his note-book, and approached. There was a milestone close to where she lay; and he sat down on that and coolly studied her. She lay upon one side, all curled and sunken, her brow on one bare arm, the other stretched out, limp and dimpled. Her young body, like a thing thrown down, had scarce a mark of life. Her breathing stirred her not. The deadliest fatigue was thus confessed in every language of the sleeping flesh. The traveller smiled grimly. As though he had looked upon a statue, he made a grudging inventory of her charms: the figure in that touching freedom of forgetfulness surprised him; the flush of slumber became her like a flower.

"Upon my word," he thought, "I did not think the

girl could be so pretty. And to think," he added, "that I am under obligation not to use one word of this!"

He put forth his stick and touched her; and at that she awoke, sat up with a cry, and looked upon him wildly.

"I trust your Highness has slept well," he said, nodding.

But she only uttered sounds.

"Compose yourself," said he, giving her certainly a brave example in his own demeanour. "My chaise is close at hand; and I shall have, I trust, the singular entertainment of abducting a sovereign Princess."

"Sir John!" she said at last.

"At your Highness's disposal," he replied.

She sprang to her feet. "O!" she cried, "have you come from Mittwalden?"

"This morning," he returned, "I left it; and if there is anyone less likely to return to it than yourself, behold him!"

"The Baron——" she began, and paused.

"Madam," he answered, "it was well meant, and you are quite a Judith; but after the hours that have elapsed you will probably be relieved to hear that he is fairly well. I took his news this morning ere I left. Doing fairly well, they said, but suffering acutely. Hey?—acutely. They could hear his groans in the next room."

"And the Prince," she asked, "is anything known of him?"

"It is reported," replied Sir John, with the same pleasurable deliberation, "that upon that point your Highness is the best authority."

"Sir John," she said eagerly, "you were generous enough to speak about your carriage. Will you, I beseech you, will you take me to the Felsenburg? I have business there of an extreme importance."

"I can refuse you nothing," replied the old gentleman, gravely and seriously enough. "Whatever, madam, it is in my power to do for you, that shall be done with pleasure.

As soon as my chaise shall overtake us, it is yours to carry you where you will. But," added he, reverting to his former manner, " I observe you ask me nothing of the Palace."

" I do not care," she said. " I thought I saw it burning."

" Prodigious ! " said the Baronet. " You thought ? And can the loss of forty toilettes leave you cold ? Well, madam, I admire your fortitude. And the state, too ? As I left, the government was sitting,—the new government, of which at least two members must be known to you by name : Sabra, who had, I believe, the benefit of being formed in your employment—a footman,—am I right ?— and our old friend the Chancellor, in something of a subaltern position. But in these convulsions the last shall be first, and the first last."

" Sir John," she said, with an air of perfect honesty, " I am sure you mean most kindly, but these matters have no interest for me."

The Baronet was so utterly discountenanced that he hailed the appearance of his chaise with welcome, and, by way of saying something, proposed that they should walk back to meet it. So it was done ; and he helped her in with courtesy, mounted to her side, and from various receptacles (for the chaise was most completely fitted out) produced fruits and truffled liver, beautiful white bread, and a bottle of delicate wine. With these he served her like a father, coaxing and praising her to fresh exertions ; and during all that time, as though silenced by the laws of hospitality, he was not guilty of the shadow of a sneer. Indeed, his kindness seemed so genuine that Seraphina was moved to gratitude.

" Sir John," she said, " you hate me in your heart ; why are you so kind to me ? "

" Ah, my good lady," said he with no disclaimer of the accusation, " I have the honour to be much your husband's friend, and somewhat his admirer."

"You!" she cried. "They told me you wrote cruelly of both of us."

"Such was the strange path by which we grew acquainted," said Sir John. "I had written, madam, with particular cruelty (since that shall be the phrase) of your fair self. Your husband set me at liberty, gave me a passport, ordered a carriage, and then, with the most boyish spirit, challenged me to fight. Knowing the nature of his married life, I thought the dash and loyalty he showed delightful. 'Do not be afraid,' says he: 'if I am killed there is nobody to miss me.' It appears you subsequently thought of that yourself. But I digress. I explained to him it was impossible that I could fight! 'Not if I strike you?' says he. Very droll; I wish I could have put it in my book. However, I was conquered, took the young gentleman to my high favour, and tore up my bits of scandal on the spot. That is one of the little favours, madam, that you owe your husband."

Seraphina sat for some while in silence. She could bear to be misjudged without a pang by those whom she contemned; she had none of Otto's eagerness to be approved, but went her own way straight and head in air. To Sir John, however, after what he had said, and as her husband's friend, she was prepared to stoop.

"What do you think of me?" she asked abruptly.

"I have told you already," said Sir John: "I think you want another glass of my good wine."

"Come," she said, "this is unlike you. You are not wont to be afraid. You say that you admire my husband: in his name, be honest."

"I admire your courage," said the Baronet. "Beyond that, as you have guessed, and indeed said, our natures are not sympathetic."

"You spoke of scandal," pursued Seraphina. "Was the scandal great?"

"It was considerable," said Sir John.

"And you believed it?" she demanded.

"O, madam," said Sir John, "the question!"

"Thank you for that answer!" cried Seraphina. "And now here, I will tell you, upon my honour, upon my soul, in spite of all the scandal in this world, I am as true a wife as ever stood."

"We should probably not agree upon a definition," observed Sir John.

"O!" she cried, "I have abominably used him—I know that; it is not that I mean. But if you admire my husband, I insist that you shall understand me: I can look him in the face without a blush."

"It may be, madam," said Sir John; "nor have I presumed to think the contrary."

"You will not believe me?" she cried. "You think I am a guilty wife? You think he was my lover?"

"Madam," returned the Baronet, "when I tore up my papers I promised your good husband to concern myself no more with your affairs; and I assure you for the last time that I have no desire to judge you."

"But you will not acquit me! Ah!" she cried, "*he* will—he knows me better!"

Sir John smiled.

"You smile at my distress?" asked Seraphina.

"At your woman's coolness," said Sir John. "A man would scarce have had the courage of that cry, which was, for all that, very natural, and I make no doubt quite true. But remark, madam—since you do me the honour to consult me gravely—I have no pity for what you call your distresses. You have been completely selfish, and now reap the consequence. Had you once thought of your husband, instead of singly thinking of yourself, you would not now have been alone, a fugitive, with blood upon your hands, and hearing from a morose old Englishman truth more bitter than scandal."

"I thank you," she said, quivering. "This is very true. Will you stop the carriage?"

"No, child," said Sir John, "not until I see you mistress of yourself."

There was a long pause, during which the carriage rolled by rock and woodland.

"And now," she resumed, with perfect steadiness, "will you consider me composed? I request you, as a gentleman, to let me out."

"I think you do unwisely," he replied. "Continue, if you please, to use my carriage."

"Sir John," she said, "if death were sitting on that pile of stones, I would alight! I do not blame, I thank you; I now know how I appear to others; but sooner than draw breath beside a man who can so think of me, I would—— O!" she cried, and was silent.

Sir John pulled the string, alighted, and offered her his hand, but she refused the help.

The road had now issued from the valleys in which it had been winding, and come to that part of its course where it runs, like a cornice, along the brow of the steep northward face of Grünewald. The place where they had alighted was at a salient angle; a bold rock and some wind-tortured pine-trees overhung it from above; far below the blue plains lay forth and melted into heaven; and before them the road, by a succession of bold zigzags, was seen mounting to where a tower upon a tall cliff closed the view.

"There," said the Baronet, pointing to the tower, "you see the Felsenburg, your goal. I wish you a good journey, and regret I cannot be of more assistance."

He mounted to his place and gave a signal, and the carriage rolled away.

Seraphina stood by the wayside, gazing before her with blind eyes. Sir John she had dismissed already from her mind; she hated him, that was enough; for whatever Seraphina hated or contemned fell instantly to Lilliputian smallness, and was thenceforward steadily ignored in thought. And now she had matter for concern indeed.

Her interview with Otto, which she had never yet forgiven him, began to appear before her in a very different light. He had come to her, still thrilling under recent insult, and not yet breathed from fighting her own cause ; and how that knowledge changed the value of his words ! Yes, he must have loved her ; this was a brave feeling—it was no mere weakness of the will. And she, was she incapable of love ? It would appear so ; and she swallowed her tears, and yearned to see Otto, to explain all, to ask pity upon her knees for her transgressions, and, if all else were now beyond the reach of reparation, to restore at least the liberty of which she had deprived him.

Swiftly she sped along the highway, and, as the road wound out and in about the bluffs and gullies of the mountain, saw and lost by glimpses the tall tower that stood before and above her, purpled by the mountain air.

CHAPTER II

TREATS OF A CHRISTIAN VIRTUE

When Otto mounted to his rolling prison he found another occupant in a corner of the front seat; but as this person hung his head and the brightness of the carriage-lamps shone outward, the Prince could only see it was a man. The Colonel followed his prisoner and clapped-to the door; and at that the four horses broke immediately into a swinging trot.

"Gentlemen," said the Colonel, after some little while had passed, "if we are to travel in silence, we might as well be at home. I appear, of course, in an invidious character; but I am a man of taste, fond of books and solidly informing talk, and unfortunately condemned for life to the guard-room. Gentlemen, this is my chance: don't spoil it for me. I have here the pick of the whole court, barring lovely woman; I have a great author in the person of the Doctor——"

"Gotthold!" cried Otto.

"It appears," said the Doctor bitterly, "that we must go together. Your Highness had not calculated upon that."

"What do you infer?" cried Otto; "that I had you arrested?"

"The inference is simple," said the Doctor.

"Colonel Gordon," said the Prince, "oblige me so far, and set me right with Herr von Hohenstockwitz."

"Gentlemen," said the Colonel, "you are both arrested on the same warrant in the name of the Princess Seraphina, acting regent, countersigned by Prime Minister Freiherr

von Gondremark, and dated the day before yesterday, the twelfth. I reveal to you the secrets of the prison-house," he added.

"Otto," said Gotthold, "I ask you to pardon my suspicions."

"Gotthold," said the Prince, "I am not certain I can grant you that."

"Your Highness is, I am sure, far too magnanimous to hesitate," said the Colonel. "But allow me: we speak at home in my religion of the means of grace: and I now propose to offer them." So saying, the Colonel lighted a bright lamp which he attached to one side of the carriage, and from below the front seat produced a goodly basket adorned with the long necks of bottles. "*Tu spem reducis* —how does it go, Doctor?" he asked gaily. "I am, in a sense, your host; and I am sure you are both far too considerate of my embarrassing position to refuse to do me honour. Gentlemen, I drink to the Prince!"

"Colonel," said Otto, "we have a jovial entertainer. I drink to Colonel Gordon."

Thereupon all three took their wine very pleasantly; and even as they did so, the carriage with a lurch turned into the high-road and began to make better speed.

All was bright within; the wine had coloured Gotthold's cheek; dim forms of forest trees, dwindling and spiring, scarves of the starry sky, now wide and now narrow, raced past the windows; through one that was left open the air of the woods came in with a nocturnal raciness; and the roll of wheels and the tune of the trotting horses sounded merrily on the ear. Toast followed toast; glass after glass was bowed across and emptied by the trio; and presently there began to fall upon them a luxurious spell, under the influence of which little but the sound of quiet and confidential laughter interrupted the long intervals of meditative silence.

"Otto," said Gotthold, after one of these seasons of

quiet, " I do not ask you to forgive me. Were the parts reversed, I could not forgive you."

" Well," said Otto, " it is a phrase we use. I do forgive you, but your words and your suspicions rankle ; and not yours alone. It is idle, Colonel Gordon, in view of the order you are carrying out, to conceal from you the dissensions of my family ; they have gone so far that they are now public property. Well, gentlemen, can I forgive my wife ? I can, of course, and do ; but in what sense ? I would certainly not stoop to any revenge ; as certainly I could not think of her but as one changed beyond my recognition."

" Allow me," returned the Colonel. " You will permit me to hope that I am addressing Christians ? We are all conscious, I trust, that we are miserable sinners."

" I disown the consciousness," said Gotthold. " Warmed with this good fluid, I deny your thesis."

" How, sir ? You never did anything wrong ? and I heard you asking pardon but this moment, not of your God, sir, but of a common fellow-worm ! " the Colonel cried.

" I own you have me ; you are expert in argument, Herr Oberst," said the Doctor.

" Begad, sir, I am proud to hear you say so," said the Colonel. " I was well grounded indeed at Aberdeen. And as for this matter of forgiveness, it comes, sir, of loose views and (what is if anything more dangerous) a regular life. A sound creed and a bad morality, that's the root of wisdom. You two gentlemen are too good to be forgiving."

" The paradox is somewhat forced," said Gotthold.

" Pardon me, Colonel," said the Prince ; " I readily acquit you of any design of offence, but your words bite like satire. Is this a time, do you think, when I can wish to hear myself called good, now that I am paying the penalty (and am willing like yourself to think it just) of my prolonged misconduct ? "

"O, pardon me!" cried the Colonel. "You have never been expelled from the divinity hall; you have never been broke. I was: broke for a neglect of military duty. To tell you the open truth, your Highness, I was the worse of drink; it's a thing I never do now," he added, taking out his glass. "But a man, you see, who has really tasted the defects of his own character, as I have, and has come to regard himself as a kind of blind teetotum knocking about life, begins to learn a very different view about forgiveness. I will talk of not forgiving others, sir, when I have made out to forgive myself, and not before; and the date is like to be a long one. My father, the Reverend Alexander Gordon, was a good man, and damned hard upon others. I am what they call a bad one, and that is just the difference. The man who cannot forgive any mortal thing is a green hand in life."

"And yet I have heard of you, Colonel, as a duellist," said Gotthold.

"A different thing, sir," replied the soldier. "Professional etiquette. And I trust without unchristian feeling."

Presently after the Colonel fell into a deep sleep; and his companions looked upon each other, smiling.

"An odd fish," said Gotthold.

"And a strange guardian," said the Prince. "Yet what he said was true."

"Rightly looked upon," mused Gotthold, "it is ourselves that we cannot forgive, when we refuse forgiveness to our friend. Some strand of our own misdoing is involved in every quarrel."

"Are there not offences that disgrace the pardoner?" asked Otto. "Are there not bounds of self-respect?"

"Otto," said Gotthold, "does any man respect himself? To this poor waif of a soldier of fortune we may seem respectable gentlemen; but to ourselves, what are we unless a pasteboard portico and a deliquium of deadly weaknesses within?"

" I ? yes," said Otto ; " but you, Gotthold—you, with your interminable industry, your keen mind, your books —serving mankind, scorning pleasures and temptations ! You do not know how I envy you."

" Otto," said the Doctor, " in one word, and a bitter one to say : I am a secret tippler. Yes, I drink too much. The habit has robbed these very books, to which you praise my devotion, of the merits that they should have had. It has spoiled my temper. When I spoke to you the other day, how much of my warmth was in the cause of virtue ? how much was the fever of last night's wine ? Ay, as my poor fellow-sot there said, and as I vaingloriously denied, we are all miserable sinners, put here for a moment, knowing the good, choosing the evil, standing naked and ashamed in the eye of God."

" Is it so ? " said Otto. " Why, then, what are we ? Are the very best——"

" There is no best in man," said Gotthold. " I am not better, it is likely I am not worse, than you or that poor sleeper. I was a sham, and now you know me : that is all."

" And yet it has not changed my love," returned Otto softly. " Our misdeeds do not change us. Gotthold, fill your glass. Let us drink to what is good in this bad business ; let us drink to our old affection ; and, when we have done so, forgive your too just grounds of offence, and drink with me to my wife, whom I have so misused, who has so misused me, and whom I have left, I fear, I greatly fear, in danger. What matters it how bad we are, if others can still love us, and we can still love others ? "

" Ay ! " replied the Doctor. " It is very well said. It is the true answer to the pessimist, and the standing miracle of mankind. So you still love me ? and so you can forgive your wife ? Why, then, we may bid conscience ' Down, dog,' like an ill-trained puppy yapping at shadows."

The pair fell into silence, the Doctor tapping on his empty glass.

The carriage swung forth out of the valleys on that open balcony of high-road that runs along the front of Grünewald, looking down on Gerolstein. Far below, a white waterfall was shining to the stars from the falling skirts of forest, and beyond that, the night stood naked above the plain. On the other hand, the lamplight skimmed the face of the precipices, and the dwarf pine-trees twinkled with all their needles, and were gone again into the wake. The granite roadway thundered under wheels and hoofs; and at times, by reason of its continual winding, Otto could see the escort on the other side of a ravine, riding well together in the night. Presently the Felsenburg came plainly in view, some way above them, on a bold projection of the mountain, and planting its bulk against the starry sky.

"See, Gotthold," said the Prince, "our destination."

Gotthold awoke as from a trance.

"I was thinking," said he, "if there is any danger, why did you not resist? I was told you came of your free will; but should you not be there to help her?"

The colour faded from the Prince's cheeks.

CHAPTER III

PROVIDENCE VON ROSEN: ACT THE LAST IN WHICH SHE GALLOPS OFF

When the busy Countess came forth from her interview with Seraphina, it is not too much to say that she was beginning to be terribly afraid. She paused in the corridor and reckoned up her doings with an eye to Gondremark. The fan was in requisition in an instant; but her disquiet was beyond the reach of fanning. "The girl has lost her head," she thought; and then dismally, "I have gone too far." She instantly decided on secession. Now the *Mons Sacer* of the Frau von Rosen was a certain rustic villa in the forest, called by herself, in a smart attack of poesy, Tannen Zauber, and by everybody else plain Kleinbrunn.

Thither, upon the thought, she furiously drove, passing Gondremark at the entrance to the palace avenue, but feigning not to observe him; and as Kleinbrunn was seven good miles away, and in the bottom of a narrow dell, she passed the night without any rumour of the outbreak reaching her; and the glow of the conflagration was concealed by intervening hills. Frau von Rosen did not sleep well; she was seriously uneasy as to the results of her delightful evening, and saw herself condemned to quite a lengthy sojourn in her deserts and a long defensive correspondence, ere she could venture to return to Gondremark. On the other hand, she examined, by way of pastime, the deeds she had received from Otto; and even here saw cause for disappointment. In these troublous days she had no taste for landed property, and she was convinced, besides, that Otto had paid dearer than the

farm was worth. Lastly, the order for the Prince's release fairly burned her meddling fingers.

All things considered, the next day beheld an elegant and beautiful lady, in a riding-habit and a flapping hat, draw bridle at the gate of the Felsenburg, not perhaps with any clear idea of her purpose, but with her usual experimental views on life. Governor Gordon, summoned to the gate, welcomed the omnipotent Countess with his most gallant bearing, though it was wonderful how old he looked in the morning.

"Ah, Governor," she said, "we have surprises for you, sir," and nodded at him meaningly.

"Eh, madam, leave me my prisoners," he said; "and if you will but join the band, begad, I'll be happy for life."

"You would spoil me, would you not?" she asked.

"I would try, I would try," returned the Governor, and he offered her his arm.

She took it, picked up her skirt, and drew him close to her. "I have come to see the Prince," she said. "Now, infidel! on business. A message from that stupid Gondremark, who keeps me running like a courier. Do I look like one, Herr Gordon?" And she planted her eyes in him.

"You look like an angel, ma'am," returned the Governor, with a great air of finished gallantry.

The Countess laughed. "An angel on horseback!" she said. "Quick work."

"You came, you saw, you conquered," flourished Gordon, in high good humour with his own wit and grace. "We toasted you, madam, in the carriage, in an excellent good glass of wine; toasted you fathom deep; the finest woman, with, begad, the finest eyes in Grünewald. I never saw the like of them but once, in my own country, when I was a young fool at College: Thomasina Haig her name was. I give you my word of honour, she was as like you as two peas."

"And so you were merry in the carriage?" asked the Countess, gracefully dissembling a yawn.

"We were; we had a very pleasant conversation; but we took perhaps a glass more than that fine fellow of a Prince has been accustomed to," said the Governor; "and I observe this morning that he seems a little off his mettle. We'll get him mellow again ere bedtime. This is his door."

"Well," she whispered, "let me get my breath. No, no; wait. Have the door ready to open." And the Countess, standing like one inspired, shook out her fine voice in "Lascia ch'io pianga"; and when she had reached the proper point, and lyrically uttered forth her sighings after liberty, the door, at a sign, was flung wide open, and she swam into the Prince's sight, bright-eyed, and with her colour somewhat freshened by the exercise of singing. It was a great dramatic entrance, and to the somewhat doleful prisoner within the sight was sunshine.

"Ah, madam," he cried, running to her—"you here!"

She looked meaningly at Gordon; and as soon as the door was closed she fell on Otto's neck. "To see you here!" she moaned and clung to him.

But the Prince stood somewhat stiffly in that enviable situation, and the Countess instantly recovered from her outburst.

"Poor child," she said, "poor child! Sit down beside me here, and tell me all about it. My heart really bleeds to see you. How does time go?"

"Madam," replied the Prince, sitting down beside her, his gallantry recovered, "the time will now go all too quickly till you leave. But I must ask you for the news. I have most bitterly condemned myself for my inertia of last night. You wisely counselled me: it was my duty to resist. You wisely and nobly counselled me; I have since thought of it with wonder. You have a noble heart."

"Otto," she said, "spare me. Was it even right, I wonder? I have duties, too, you poor child; and when I see you they all melt—all my good resolutions fly away."

"And mine still come too late," he replied, sighing. "O, what would I not give to have resisted? What would I not give for freedom?"

"Well, what would you give?" she asked; and the red fan was spread; only her eyes, as if from over battlements, brightly surveyed him.

"I? What do you mean? Madam, you have some news for me," he cried.

"O, O!" said madam dubiously.

He was at her feet. "Do not trifle with my hopes," he pleaded. "Tell me, dearest Madame von Rosen, tell me! You cannot be cruel: it is not in your nature. Give? I can give nothing; I have nothing; I can only plead in mercy."

"Do not," she said; "it is not fair. Otto, you know my weakness. Spare me. Be generous."

"O, madam," he said, "it is for you to be generous, to have pity." He took her hand and pressed it; he plied her with caresses and appeals. The Countess had a most enjoyable sham siege, and then relented. She sprang to her feet, she tore her dress open, and, all warm from her bosom, threw the order on the floor.

"There!" she cried. "I forced it from her. Use it, and I am ruined!" And she turned away as if to veil the force of her emotions.

Otto sprang upon the paper, read it, and cried out aloud. "O, God bless her!" he said, "God bless her." And he kissed the writing.

Von Rosen was a singularly good-natured woman, but her part was now beyond her. "Ingrate!" she cried; "I wrung it from her, I betrayed my trust to get it, and 'tis she you thank!"

"Can you blame me?" said the Prince. "I love her."

"I see that," she said. "And I?"

"You, Madame von Rosen? You are my dearest, my kindest, and most generous of friends," he said, approaching her. "You would be a perfect friend, if you were not so

lovely. You have a great sense of humour, you cannot be unconscious of your charm, and you amuse yourself at times by playing on my weakness; and at times I can take pleasure in the comedy. But not to-day: to-day you will be the true, the serious, the manly friend, and you will suffer me to forget that you are lovely and that I am weak. Come, dear Countess, let me to-day repose in you entirely."

He held out his hand, smiling, and she took it frankly. "I vow you have bewitched me," she said; and then with a laugh, "I break my staff"! she added; "and I must pay you my best compliment. You made a difficult speech. You are as adroit, dear Prince, as I am—charming." And as she said the word with a great curtsey, she justified it.

"You hardly keep the bargain, madam, when you make yourself so beautiful," said the Prince, bowing.

"It was my last arrow," she returned. "I am disarmed. Blank cartridge, *O mon Prince!* And now I tell you, if you choose to leave this prison, you can, and I am ruined. Choose!"

"Madame von Rosen," replied Otto, "I choose, and I will go. My duty points me, duty still neglected by this Featherhead. But do not fear to be a loser. I propose instead that you should take me with you, a bear in chains, to Baron Gondremark. I am become perfectly unscrupulous: to save my wife I will do all, all he can ask or fancy. He shall be filled; were he huge as leviathan and greedy as the grave, I will content him. And you, the fairy of our pantomime, shall have the credit."

"Done!" she cried. "Admirable! Prince Charming no longer—Prince Sorcerer, Prince Solon! Let us go this moment. Stay," she cried, pausing. "I beg, dear Prince, to give you back these deeds. 'Twas you who liked the farm—I have not seen it; and it was you who wished to benefit the peasants. And, besides," she added, with a comical change of tone, "I should prefer the ready money."

Both laughed. "Here I am, once more a farmer," said Otto, accepting the papers, "but overwhelmed in debt."

The Countess touched a bell, and the Governor appeared.

"Governor," she said, "I am going to elope with his Highness. The result of our talk has been a thorough understanding, and the *coup d'état* is over. Here is the order."

Colonel Gordon adjusted silver spectacles upon his nose. "Yes," he said, "the Princess: very right. But the warrant, madam, was countersigned."

"By Heinrich!" said von Rosen. "Well, and here am I to represent him."

"Well, your Highness," resumed the soldier of fortune, "I must congratulate you upon my loss. You have been cut out by beauty, and I am left lamenting. The Doctor still remains to me: *probus, doctus, lepidus, jucundus:* a man of books."

"Ay, there is nothing about poor Gotthold," said the Prince.

"The Governor's consolation? Would you leave him bare?" asked von Rosen.

"And, your Highness," resumed Gordon, "may I trust that in the course of this temporary obscuration, you have found me discharge my part with suitable respect and, I may add, tact? I adopted purposely a cheerfulness of manner; mirth, it appeared to me, and a good glass of wine, were the fit alleviations."

"Colonel," said Otto, holding out his hand, "your society was of itself enough. I do not merely thank you for your pleasant spirits; I have to thank you, besides, for some philosophy, of which I stood in need. I trust I do not see you for the last time; and in the meanwhile, as a memento of our strange acquaintance, let me offer you these verses on which I was but now engaged. I am so little of a poet, and was so ill inspired by prison bars, that they have some claim to be at least a curiosity."

The Colonel's countenance lighted as he took the paper;

the silver spectacles were hurriedly replaced. "Ha!" he said, "Alexandrines, the tragic metre. I shall cherish this, your Highness, like a relic; no more suitable offering, although I say it, could be made. '*Dieux de l'immense plaine et des vastes forêts.*' Very good," he said, "very good indeed! '*Et du geôlier lui-même apprendre des leçons.*' Most handsome, begad!"

"Come, Governor," cried the Countess, "you can read his poetry when we are gone. Open your grudging portals."

"I ask your pardon," said the Colonel. "To a man of my character and tastes, these verses, this handsome reference—most moving, I assure you. Can I offer you an escort?"

"No, no," replied the Countess. "We go incognito, as we arrived. We ride together; the Prince will take my servant's horse. Hurry and privacy, Herr Oberst, that is all we seek." And she began impatiently to lead the way.

But Otto had still to bid farewell to Dr. Gotthold; and, the Governor following, with his spectacles in one hand and the paper in the other, had still to communicate his treasured verses, piece by piece, as he succeeded in deciphering the manuscript, to all he came across; and still his enthusiasm mounted. "I declare," he cried at last, with the air of one who has at length divined a mystery, "they remind me of Robbie Burns!"

But there is an end to all things; and at length Otto was walking by the side of Madame von Rosen, along that mountain wall, her servant following with both the horses, and all about them sunlight, and breeze, and flying bird, and the vast regions of the air, and the capacious prospect: wildwood and climbing pinnacle, and the sound and voice of mountain torrents, at their hand; and far below them, green melting into sapphire on the plains.

They walked at first in silence; for Otto's mind was full of the delight of liberty and nature, and still, between-

whiles, he was preparing his interview with Gondremark. But when the first rough promontory of the rock was turned, and the Felsenburg concealed behind its bulk, the lady paused.

"Here," she said, "I will dismount poor Karl, and you and I must ply our spurs. I love a wild ride with a good companion."

As she spoke, a carriage came into sight round the corner next below them in the order of the road. It came heavily creaking, and a little ahead of it a traveller was soberly walking, note-book in hand.

"It is Sir John," cried Otto, and he hailed him.

The Baronet pocketed his note-book, stared through an eye-glass, and then waved his stick; and he on his side, and the Countess and the Prince on theirs, advanced with somewhat quicker steps. They met at the re-entrant angle, where a thin stream sprayed across a boulder and was scattered in rain among the brush; and the Baronet saluted the Prince with much punctilio. To the Countess, on the other hand, he bowed with a kind of sneering wonder.

"Is it possible, madam, that you have not heard the news?" he asked.

"What news?" she cried.

"News of the first order," returned Sir John: "a revolution in the state, a Republic declared, the palace burned to the ground, the Princess in flight, Gondremark wounded——"

"Heinrich wounded?" she screamed.

"Wounded and suffering acutely," said Sir John. "His groans——"

There fell from the lady's lips an oath so potent that, in smoother hours, it would have made her hearers jump. She ran to her horse, scrambled to the saddle, and, yet half-seated, dashed down the road at full gallop. The groom, after a pause of wonder, followed her. The rush of her impetuous passage almost scared the carriage-horses over the verge of the steep hill; and still she clattered

further and the crags echoed to her flight, and still the groom flogged vainly in pursuit of her. At the fourth corner, a woman trailing slowly up leaped back with a cry and escaped death by a hand's-breadth. But the Countess wasted neither glance nor thought upon the incident. Out and in, about the bluffs of the mountain wall, she fled, loose-reined, and still the groom toiled in her pursuit.

"A most impulsive lady!" said Sir John. "Who would have thought she cared for him?" And before the words were uttered, he was struggling in the Prince's grasp.

"My wife! the Princess? What of her?"

"She is down the road," he gasped. "I left her twenty minutes back."

And next moment the choked author stood alone, and the Prince on foot was racing down the hill behind the Countess.

CHAPTER IV

BABES IN THE WOOD

While the feet of the Prince continued to run swiftly, his heart, which had at first by far outstripped his running, soon began to linger and hang back. Not that he ceased to pity the misfortune or to yearn for the sight of Seraphina ; but the memory of her obdurate coldness awoke within him, and woke in turn his own habitual diffidence of self. Had Sir John been given time to tell him all, had he even known that she was speeding to the Felsenburg, he would have gone to her with ardour. As it was, he began to see himself once more intruding, profiting, perhaps, by her misfortune, and now that she was fallen, proffering unloved caresses to the wife who had spurned him in prosperity. The sore spots upon his vanity began to burn ; once more, his anger assumed the carriage of a hostile generosity ; he would utterly forgive indeed ; he would help, save, and comfort his unloving wife ; but all with distant self-denial, imposing silence on his heart, respecting Seraphina's disaffection as he would the innocence of a child. So, when at length he turned a corner and beheld the Princess, it was his first thought to reassure her of the purity of his respect, and he at once ceased running and stood still. She, upon her part, began to run to him with a little cry ; then, seeing him pause, she paused also, smitten with remorse, and at length, with the most guilty timidity, walked nearly up to where he stood.

" Otto," she said, " I have ruined all ! "

" Seraphina ! " he cried with a sob, but did not move, partly withheld by his resolutions, partly struck stupid at

the sight of her weariness and disorder. Had she stood silent, they had soon been locked in an embrace. But she too had prepared herself against the interview, and must spoil the golden hour with protestations.

"All!" she went on, "I have ruined all! But, Otto, in kindness you must hear me—not justify, but own, my faults. I have been taught so cruelly; I have had such time for thought, and see the world so changed. I have been blind, stone-blind; I have let all true good go by me, and lived on shadows. But when this dream fell, and I had betrayed you, and thought I had killed——" She paused. "I thought I had killed Gondremark," she said with a deep flush, "and I found myself alone, as you said."

The mention of the name of Gondremark pricked the Prince's generosity like a spur. "Well," he cried, "and whose fault was it but mine? It was my duty to be beside you, loved or not. But I was a skulker in the grain, and found it easier to desert than to oppose you. I could never learn that better part of love, to fight love's battles. But yet the love was there. And now when this toy kingdom of ours has fallen, first of all by my demerits, and next by your inexperience, and we are here alone together, as poor as Job and merely a man and a woman—let me conjure you to forgive the weakness and to repose in the love. Do not mistake me!" he cried, seeing her about to speak, and imposing silence with uplifted hand. "My love is changed; it is purged of any conjugal pretension; it does not ask, does not hope, does not wish for a return in kind. You may forget for ever that part in which you found me so distasteful, and accept without embarrassment the affection of a brother."

"You are too generous, Otto," she said. "I know that I have forfeited your love. I cannot take this sacrifice. You had far better leave me. O go away, and leave me to my fate!"

"O no!" said Otto; "we must first of all escape out

of this hornets' nest, to which I led you. My honour is engaged. I said but now we were as poor as Job ; and behold ! not many miles from here I have a house of my own to which I will conduct you. Otto the Prince being down, we must try what luck remains to Otto the Hunter. Come, Seraphina ; show that you forgive me, and let us set about this business of escape in the best spirits possible. You used to say, my dear, that, except as a husband and a prince, I was a pleasant fellow. I am neither now, and you may like my company without remorse. Come, then ; it were idle to be captured. Can you still walk ? Forth, then," said he, and he began to lead the way.

A little below where they stood, a good-sized brook passed below the road, which overleapt it in a single arch. On one bank of that loquacious water a footpath descended a green dell. Here it was rocky and stony, and lay on the steep scarps of the ravine ; here it was choked with brambles ; and there, in fairy haughs, it lay for a few paces evenly on the green turf. Like a sponge, the hillside oozed with well-water. The burn kept growing both in force and volume ; at every leap it fell with heavier plunges and span more widely in the pool. Great had been the labours of that stream, and great and agreeable the changes it had wrought. It had cut through dykes of stubborn rock, and now, like a blowing dolphin, spouted through the orifice ; along all its humble coasts, it had undermined and rafted-down the goodlier timber of the forest ; and on these rough clearings it now set and tended primrose gardens, and planted woods of willow, and made a favourite of the silver birch. Through all these friendly features the path, its human acolyte, conducted our two wanderers downward—Otto before, still pausing at the more difficult passages to lend assistance ; the Princess following. From time to time, when he turned to help her, her face would lighten upon his—her eyes, half desperately, woo him. He saw, but dare not understand. " She does not love me," he told himself, with magnanimity. " This is remorse

or gratitude ; I were no gentleman, no, nor yet a man, if I presumed upon these pitiful concessions."

Some way down the glen, the stream, already grown to a good bulk of water, was rudely dammed across, and about a third of it abducted in a wooden trough. Gaily the pure water, air's first cousin, fleeted along the rude aqueduct, whose sides and floor it had made green with grasses. The path, bearing it close company, threaded a wilderness of briar and wild-rose. And presently, a little in front, the brown top of a mill and the tall mill-wheel, spraying diamonds, arose in the narrows of the glen ; at the same time the snoring music of the saws broke the silence.

The miller, hearing steps, came forth to his door, and both he and Otto started.

" Good morning, miller," said the Prince. " You were right, it seems, and I was wrong. I give you the news, and bid you to Mittwalden. My throne has fallen—great was the fall of it !—and your good friends of the Phœnix bear the rule."

The red-faced miller looked supreme astonishment. " And your Highness ? " he gasped.

" My Highness is running away," replied Otto, " straight for the frontier."

" Leaving Grünewald ? " cried the man. " Your father's son ? It's not to be permitted ! "

" Do you arrest us, friend ? " asked Otto, smiling.

" Arrest you ? I ? " exclaimed the man. " For what does your Highness take me ? Why, sir, I make sure there is not a man in Grünewald would lay hands upon you."

" O, many, many," said the Prince ; " but from you, who were bold with me in my greatness, I should even look for aid in my distress."

The miller became the colour of beetroot. " You may say so indeed," said he. " And meanwhile, will you and your lady step into my house ? "

" We have not time for that," replied the Prince ; " but if you would oblige us with a cup of wine without here, you will give a pleasure and a service, both in one."

The miller once more coloured to the nape. He hastened to bring forth wine in a pitcher and three bright crystal tumblers. " Your Highness must not suppose," he said, as he filled them, " that I am an habitual drinker. The time when I had the misfortune to encounter you, I was a trifle overtaken, I allow ; but a more sober man than I am in my ordinary, I do not know where you are to look for ; and even this glass that I drink to you (and to the lady) is quite an unusual recreation."

The wine was drunk with due rustic courtesies ; and then, refusing further hospitality, Otto and Seraphina once more proceeded to descend the glen, which now began to open and to be invaded by the taller trees.

" I owed that man a reparation," said the Prince ; " for when we met I was in the wrong and put a sore affront upon him. I judge by myself, perhaps ; but I begin to think that no one is the better for a humiliation."

" But some have to be taught so," she replied.

" Well, well," he said, with a painful embarrassment. " Well, well. But let us think of safety. My miller is all very good, but I do not pin my faith to him. To follow down this stream will bring us, but after innumerable windings, to my house. Here, up this glade, there lies a cross-cut—the world's end for solitude—the very deer scarce visit it. Are you too tired, or could you pass that way ? "

" Choose the path, Otto. I will follow you," she said.

" No," he replied, with a singular imbecility of manner and appearance, " but I meant the path was rough. It lies, all the way, by glade and dingle, and the dingles are both deep and thorny."

" Lead on," she said. "Are you not Otto the Hunter ? "

They had now burst across a veil of underwood, and were come into a lawn among the forest, very green and

innocent, and solemnly surrounded by trees. Otto paused on the margin, looking about him with delight; then his glance returned to Seraphina, as she stood framed in that silvan pleasantness and looking at her husband with undecipherable eyes. A weakness both of the body and mind fell on him like beginnings of sleep; the cords of his activity were relaxed, his eyes clung to her. "Let us rest," he said; and he made her sit down, and himself sat down beside her on the slope of an inconsiderable mound.

She sat with her eyes downcast, her slim hand dabbling in grass, like a maid waiting for love's summons. The sound of the wind in the forest swelled and sank, and drew near them with a running rush, and died away and away in the distance into fainting whispers. Nearer hand, a bird out of the deep covert uttered broken and anxious notes. All this seemed but a halting prelude to speech. To Otto it seemed as if the whole frame of nature were waiting for his words; and yet his pride kept him silent. The longer he watched that slender and pale hand plucking at the grasses, the harder and rougher grew the fight between pride and its kindly adversary.

"Seraphina," he said at last, "it is right you should know one thing: I never . . ." He was about to say "doubted you," but was that true? And, if true, was it generous to speak of it? Silence succeeded.

"I pray you, tell it me," she said; "tell it me, in pity."

"I mean only this," he resumed, "that I understand all, and do not blame you. I understand how the brave woman must look down on the weak man. I think you were wrong in some things; but I have tried to understand it, and I do. I do not need to forget or to forgive, Seraphina, for I have understood."

"I know what I have done," she said. "I am not so weak that I can be deceived with kind speeches. I know what I have been—I see myself. I am not worth your anger, how much less to be forgiven! In all this downfall and misery, I see only me and you: you, as you have

been always ; me, as I was—me, above all ! O yes, I see myself ; and what can I think ? "

" Ah, then, let us reverse the parts ! " said Otto. " It is ourselves we cannot forgive, when we deny forgiveness to another—so a friend told me last night. On these terms, Seraphina, you see how generously I have forgiven myself. But am not *I* to be forgiven ? Come, then, forgive yourself—and me."

She did not answer in words, but reached out her hand to him quickly. He took it ; and as the smooth fingers settled and nestled in his, love ran to and fro between them in tender and transforming currents.

" Seraphina," he cried, " O forget the past ! Let me serve and help you ; let me be your servant ; it is enough for me to serve you and to be near you ; let me be near you, dear—do not send me away." He hurried his pleading like the speech of a frightened child. " It is not love," he went on ; " I do not ask for love ; my love is enough . . ."

" Otto ! " she said, as if in pain.

He looked up into her face. It was wrung with the very ecstasy of tenderness and anguish ; on her features, and most of all in her changed eyes, there shone the very light of love.

" Seraphina ? " he cried aloud, and with a sudden, tuneless voice, " Seraphina ? "

" Look round you at this glade," she cried, " and where the leaves are coming on young trees, and the flowers begin to blossom. This is where we meet, meet for the first time ; it is so much better to forget and to be born again. O what a pit there is for sins—God's mercy, man's oblivion ! "

" Seraphina," he said, " let it be so, indeed ; let all that was be merely the abuse of dreaming ; let me begin again, a stranger. I have dreamed in a long dream, that I adored a girl unkind and beautiful ; in all things my superior, but still cold, like ice. And again I dreamed,

and thought she changed and melted, glowed and turned to me. And I—who had no merit but a love, slavish and unerect—lay close, and durst not move for fear of waking."

"Lie close," she said, with a deep thrill of speech.

So they spake in the spring woods; and meanwhile, in Mittwalden Rath-haus, the Republic was declared.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL POSTSCRIPT

TO COMPLETE THE STORY

The reader well informed in modern history will not require details as to the fate of the Republic. The best account is to be found in the memoirs of Herr Greisengesang (7 Bände : Leipzig), by our passing acquaintance the licentiate Roederer. Herr Roederer, with too much of an author's licence, makes a great figure of his hero—poses him, indeed, to be the centrepiece and cloud-compeller of the whole. But, with due allowance for this bias, the book is able and complete.

The reader is of course acquainted with the vigorous and bracing pages of Sir John (2 vols. : London : Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown). Sir John, who plays but a tooth-comb in the orchestra of this historical romance, blows in his own book the big bassoon. His character is there drawn at large ; and the sympathy of Landor has countersigned the admiration of the public. One point, however, calls for explanation ; the chapter on Grünewald was torn by the hand of the author in the palace gardens ; how comes it, then, to figure at full length among my more modest pages, the Lion of the caravan ? That eminent literatus was a man of method ; " Juvenal by double entry," he was once profanely called ; and when he tore the sheets in question, it was rather, as he has since explained, in the search for some dramatic evidence of his sincerity, than with the thought of practical deletion. At that time, indeed, he was possessed of two blotted scrolls and a fair copy in double. But the chapter, as the reader knows, was honestly omitted from the famous

"Memoirs on the various Courts of Europe." It has been mine to give it to the public.

Bibliography still helps us with a further glimpse of our characters. I have here before me a small volume (printed for private circulation: no printer's name; n.d.), "Poésies par Frédéric et Amélie." Mine is a presentation copy, obtained for me by Mr. Bain in the Haymarket; and the name of the first owner is written on the fly-leaf in the hand of Prince Otto himself. The modest epigraph—"Le rime n'est pas riche"—may be attributed, with a good show of likelihood, to the same collaborator. It is strikingly appropriate, and I have found the volume very dreary. Those pieces in which I seem to trace the hand of the Princess are particularly dull and conscientious. But the booklet had a fair success with that public for which it was designed; and I have come across some evidences of a second venture of the same sort, now unprocurable. Here, at least, we may take leave of Otto and Seraphina—what do I say? of Frédéric and Amélie—ageing together peaceably at the court of the wife's father, jingling French rhymes and correcting joint proofs.

Still following the book-lists, I perceive that Mr. Swinburne has dedicated a rousing lyric and some vigorous sonnets to the memory of Gondremark; that name appears twice at least in Victor Hugo's trumpet-blasts of patriot enumeration; and I came latterly, when I supposed my task already ended, on a trace of the fallen politician and his Countess. It is in the "Diary of J. Hogg Cotterill, Esq." (that very interesting work). Mr. Cotterill, being at Naples, is introduced (May 27th) to "a Baron and Baroness Gondremark—he a man who once made a noise—she still beautiful—both witty. She complimented me much upon my French—should never have known me to be English—had known my uncle, Sir John, in Germany—recognised in me, as a family trait, some of his *grand air* and studious courtesy—asked me to call." And again (May 30th), "visited the Baronne de Gondremark—much

gratified—a most *refined, intelligent* woman, quite of the old school, now, *hélas!* extinct—had read my 'Remarks on Sicily'—it reminds her of my uncle, but with more of grace—I feared she thought there was less energy—assured no—a softer style of presentation, more of the *literary grace*, but the same first grasp of circumstance and force of thought—in short, just Buttonhole's opinion. Much encouraged. I have a real esteem for this patrician lady." The acquaintance lasted some time; and when Mr. Cotterill left in the suite of Lord Protocol, and, as he is careful to inform us, in Admiral Yardarm's flagship, one of his chief causes of regret is to leave "that most *spirituelle* and sympathetic lady, who already regards me as a younger brother."

THE WRONG BOX

WRITTEN IN COLLABORATION WITH LLOYD OSBOURNE

PREFACE

"Nothing like a little judicious levity," says Michael Finsbury in the text: nor can any better excuse be found for the volume in the reader's hand. The authors can but add that one of them is old enough to be ashamed of himself, and the other young enough to learn better.

R. L. S.
L. O.

THE WRONG BOX

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH MORRIS SUSPECTS

How very little does the amateur, dwelling at home at ease, comprehend the labours and perils of the author, and, when he smilingly skims the surface of a work of fiction, how little does he consider the hours of toil, consultation of authorities, researches in the Bodleian, correspondence with learned and illegible Germans—in one word, the vast scaffolding that was first built up and then knocked down, to while away an hour for him in a railway train! Thus I might begin this tale with a biography of Tonti—birthplace, parentage, genius probably inherited from his mother, remarkable instance of precocity, etc.—and a complete treatise on the system to which he bequeathed his name. The material is all beside me in a pigeon-hole, but I scorn to appear vainglorious. Tonti is dead, and I never saw anyone who even pretended to regret him; and, as for the tontine system, a word will suffice for all the purposes of this unvarnished narrative.

A number of sprightly youths (the more the merrier) put up a certain sum of money, which is then funded in a pool under trustees; coming on for a century later, the proceeds are fluttered for a moment in the face of the last survivor, who is probably deaf, so that he cannot even hear of his success—and who is certainly dying, so that he might just as well have lost. The peculiar poetry and even humour of the scheme is now apparent, since it is one by which nobody concerned can possibly profit; but its

fine, sportsmanlike character endeared it to our grandparents.

When Joseph Finsbury and his brother Masterman were little lads in white-frilled trousers, their father—a well-to-do merchant in Cheapside—caused them to join a small but rich tontine of seven-and-thirty lives. A thousand pounds was the entrance fee; and Joseph Finsbury can remember to this day the visit to the lawyer's, where the members of the tontine—all children like himself—were assembled together, and sat in turn in the big office chair, and signed their names with the assistance of a kind old gentleman in spectacles and Wellington boots. He remembers playing with the children afterwards on the lawn at the back of the lawyer's house, and a battle-royal that he had with a brother tontiner who had kicked his shins. The sound of war called forth the lawyer from where he was dispensing cake and wine to the assembled parents in the office, and the combatants were separated, and Joseph's spirit (for he was the smaller of the two) commended by the gentleman in the Wellington boots, who vowed he had been just such another at the same age. Joseph wondered to himself if he had worn at that time little Wellingtons and a little bald head, and when, in bed at night, he grew tired of telling himself stories of sea-fights, he used to dress himself up as the old gentleman, and entertain other little boys and girls with cake and wine.

In the year 1840 the thirty-seven were all alive; in 1850 their number had decreased by six; in 1856 and 1857 business was more lively, for the Crimea and the Mutiny carried off no less than nine. There remained in 1870 but five of the original members, and at the date of my story, including the two Finsburys, but three.

By this time Masterman was in his seventy-third year; he had long complained of the effects of age, had long since retired from business, and now lived in absolute seclusion under the roof of his son Michael, the well-known solicitor. Joseph, on the other hand, was still up and

about, and still presented but a semi-venerable figure on the streets in which he loved to wander. This was the more to be deplored because Masterman had led (even to the least particular) a model British life. Industry, regularity, respectability, and a preference for the four per cents. are understood to be the very foundations of a green old age All these Masterman had eminently displayed, and here he was, *ab agendo*, at seventy-three ; while Joseph, barely two years younger, and in the most excellent preservation, had disgraced himself through life by idleness and eccentricity. Embarked in the leather trade, he had early wearied of business, for which he was supposed to have small parts. A taste for general information, not promptly checked, had soon begun to sap his manhood. There is no passion more debilitating to the mind, unless, perhaps, it be that itch of public speaking which it not infrequently accompanies or begets. The two were conjoined in the case of Joseph ; the acute stage of this double malady, that in which the patient delivers gratuitous lectures, soon declared itself with severity, and not many years had passed over his head before he would have travelled thirty miles to address an infant school. He was no student ; his reading was confined to elementary text-books and the daily papers ; he did not even fly as high as cyclopædias ; life, he would say, was his volume. His lectures were not meant, he would declare, for college professors ; they were addressed direct to " the great heart of the people," and the heart of the people must certainly be sounder than its head, for his lucubrations were received with favour. That entitled, " How to Live Cheerfully on Forty Pounds a Year," created a sensation among the unemployed. " Education : Its Aims, Objects, Purposes, and Desirability," gained him the respect of the shallow-minded. As for his celebrated essay on " Life Insurance Regarded in its Relation to the Masses," read before the Working Men's Mutual Improvement Society, Isle of Dogs, it was received with

a "literal ovation" by an unintelligent audience of both sexes, and so marked was the effect that he was next year elected honorary president of the institution, an office of less than no emolument—since the holder was expected to come down with a donation—but one which highly satisfied his self-esteem.

While Joseph was thus building himself up a reputation among the more cultivated portion of the ignorant, his domestic life was suddenly overwhelmed by orphans. The death of his younger brother Jacob saddled him with the charge of two boys, Morris and John; and in the course of the same year his family was still further swelled by the addition of a little girl, the daughter of John Henry Hazeltine, Esq., a gentleman of small property and fewer friends. He had met Joseph only once, at a lecture-hall in Holloway; but from that formative experience he returned home to make a new will, and consign his daughter and her fortune to the lecturer. Joseph had a kindly disposition; and yet it was not without reluctance that he accepted this new responsibility, advertised for a nurse, and purchased a second-hand perambulator. Morris and John he made more readily welcome; not so much because of the tie of consanguinity as because the leather business (in which he hastened to invest their fortune of thirty thousand pounds) had recently exhibited inexplicable symptoms of decline. A young but capable Scot was chosen as manager to the enterprise, and the cares of business never again afflicted Joseph Finsbury. Leaving his charges in the hands of the capable Scot (who was married), he began his extensive travels on the Continent and in Asia Minor.

With a polyglot Testament in one hand and a phrase-book in the other, he groped his way among the speakers of eleven European languages. The first of these guides is hardly applicable to the purposes of the philosophic traveller, and even the second is designed more expressly for the tourist than for the expert in life. But he pressed

interpreters into his service—whenever he could get their services for nothing—and by one means and another filled many note-books with the results of his researches.

In these wanderings he spent several years, and only returned to England when the increasing age of his charges needed his attention. The two lads had been placed in a good but economical school, where they had received a sound commercial education; which was somewhat awkward, as the leather business was by no means in a state to court inquiry. In fact, when Joseph went over his accounts preparatory to surrendering his trust, he was dismayed to discover that his brother's fortune had not increased by his stewardship; even by making over to his two wards every penny he had in the world, there would still be a deficit of seven thousand eight hundred pounds. When these facts were communicated to the two brothers in the presence of a lawyer, Morris Finsbury threatened his uncle with all the terrors of the law, and was only prevented from taking extreme steps by the advice of the professional man.

"You cannot get blood from a stone," observed the lawyer.

And Morris saw the point and came to terms with his uncle. On the one side, Joseph gave up all that he possessed, and assigned to his nephew his contingent interest in the tontine, already quite a hopeful speculation. On the other, Morris agreed to harbour his uncle and Miss Hazeltine (who had come to grief with the rest), and to pay to each of them one pound a month as pocket-money. The allowance was amply sufficient for the old man; it scarce appears how Miss Hazeltine contrived to dress upon it; but she did, and, what is more, she never complained. She was, indeed, sincerely attached to her incompetent guardian. He had never been unkind; his age spoke for him loudly; there was something appealing in his whole-souled quest of knowledge and innocent delight in the smallest mark of admiration; and, though

the lawyer had warned her she was being sacrificed, Julia had refused to add to the perplexities of Uncle Joseph.

In a large, dreary house in John Street, Bloomsbury, these four dwelt together; a family in appearance, in reality a financial association. Julia and Uncle Joseph were, of course, slaves; John, a gentleman with a taste for the banjo, the music-hall, the Gaiety bar, and the sporting papers, must have been anywhere a secondary figure; and the cares and delights of empire devolved entirely upon Morris. That these are inextricably intermixed is one of the commonplaces with which the bland essayist consoles the incompetent and the obscure, but in the case of Morris the bitter must have largely outweighed the sweet. He grudged no trouble to himself, he spared none to others; he called the servants in the morning, he served out the stores with his own hand, he took soundings of the sherry, he numbered the remainder biscuits; painful scenes took place over the weekly bills, and the cook was frequently impeached, and the tradespeople came and hectored with him in the back parlour upon a question of three farthings. The superficial might have deemed him a miser; in his own eyes he was simply a man who had been defrauded; the world owed him seven thousand eight hundred pounds, and he intended that the world should pay.

But it was in his dealings with Joseph that Morris's character particularly shone. His uncle was a rather gambling stock in which he had invested heavily; and he spared no pains in nursing the security. The old man was seen monthly by a physician, whether he was well or ill. His diet, his raiment, his occasional outings, now to Brighton, now to Bournemouth, were doled out to him like pap to infants. In bad weather he must keep the house. In good weather, by half-past nine, he must be ready in the hall; Morris would see that he had gloves and that his shoes were sound; and the pair would start for the leather business arm in arm. The way there was

probably dreary enough, for there was no pretence of friendly feeling; Morris had never ceased to upbraid his guardian with his defalcation and to lament the burthen of Miss Hazeltine; and Joseph, though he was a mild enough soul, regarded his nephew with something very near akin to hatred. But the way there was nothing to the journey back; for the mere sight of the place of business, as well as every detail of its transactions, was enough to poison life for any Finsbury.

Joseph's name was still over the door; it was he who still signed the cheques; but this was only policy on the part of Morris, and designed to discourage other members of the tontine. In reality the business was entirely his; and he found it an inheritance of sorrows. He tried to sell it, and the offers he received were quite derisory. He tried to extend it, and it was only the liabilities he succeeded in extending; to restrict it, and it was only the profits he managed to restrict. Nobody had ever made money out of that concern except the capable Scot, who retired (after his discharge) to the neighbourhood of Banff and built a castle with his profits. The memory of this fallacious Caledonian Morris would revile daily, as he sat in the private office opening his mail, with old Joseph at another table, sullenly awaiting orders, or savagely affixing signatures to he knew not what. And when the man of the heather pushed cynicism so far as to send him the announcement of his second marriage (to Davida, eldest daughter of the Rev. Alexander McCraw), it was really supposed that Morris would have had a fit.

Business hours, in the Finsbury leather trade, had been cut to the quick; even Morris's strong sense of duty to himself was not strong enough to dally within those walls and under the shadow of that bankruptcy; and presently the manager and the clerks would draw a long breath, and compose themselves for another day of procrastination. Raw Haste, on the authority of my Lord Tennyson, is half-sister to Delay; but the Business

Habits are certainly her uncles. Meanwhile, the leather merchant would lead his living investment back to John Street like a puppy dog; and, having there immured him in the hall, would depart for the day on the quest of seal rings, the only passion of his life. Joseph had more than the vanity of man, he had that of lecturers. He owned he was in fault, although more sinned against (by the capable Scot) than sinning; but had he steeped his hands in gore, he would still not deserve to be thus dragged at the chariot-wheels of a young man, to sit a captive in the halls of his own leather business, to be entertained with mortifying comments on his whole career—to have his costume examined, his collar pulled up, the presence of his mittens verified, and to be taken out and brought home in custody, like an infant with a nurse. At the thought of it his soul would swell with venom, and he would make haste to hang up his hat and coat and the detested mittens, and slink upstairs to Julia and his note-books. The drawing-room at least was sacred from Morris; it belonged to the old man and the young girl; it was there that she made her dresses; it was there that he inked his spectacles over the registration of disconnected facts and the calculation of insignificant statistics.

Here he would sometimes lament his connection with the tontine. "If it were not for that," he cried one afternoon, "he would not care to keep me. I might be a free man, Julia. And I could so easily support myself by giving lectures."

"To be sure you could," said she; "and I think it one of the meanest things he ever did to deprive you of that amusement. There were those nice people at the Isle of Cats (wasn't it?) who wrote and asked you so very kindly to give them an address. I did think he might have let you go to the Isle of Cats."

"He is a man of no intelligence," cried Joseph. "He lives here literally surrounded by the absorbing spectacle of life, and for all the good it does him, he might just as

well be in his coffin. Think of his opportunities! The heart of any other young man would burn within him at the chance. The amount of information that I have it in my power to convey, if he would only listen, is a thing that beggars language, Julia."

"Whatever you do, my dear, you mustn't excite yourself," said Julia; "for you know, if you look at all ill, the doctor will be sent for."

"That is very true," returned the old man humbly, "I will compose myself with a little study." He thumbed his gallery of note-books. "I wonder," he said, "I wonder (since I see your hands are occupied) whether it might not interest you——"

"Why, of course it would," cried Julia. "Read me one of your nice stories, there's a dear!"

He had the volume down and his spectacles upon his nose instanter, as though to forestall some possible retractation. "What I propose to read to you," said he, skimming through the pages, "is the notes of a highly important conversation with a Dutch courier of the name of David Abbas, which is the Latin for abbot. Its results are well worth the money it cost me, for, as Abbas at first appeared somewhat impatient, I was induced to (what is, I believe, singularly called) stand him drink. It runs only to about five-and-twenty pages. Yes, here it is." He cleared his throat, and began to read.

Mr. Finsbury (according to his own report) contributed about four hundred and ninety-nine five-hundredths of the interview, and elicited from Abbas literally nothing. It was dull for Julia, who did not require to listen; for the Dutch courier, who had to answer, it must have been a perfect nightmare. It would seem as if he had consoled himself by frequent appliances to the bottle; it would even seem that (toward the end) he had ceased to depend on Joseph's frugal generosity and called for the flagon on his own account. The effect, at least, of some mellowing influence was visible in the record: Abbas became suddenly

a willing witness ; he began to volunteer disclosures ; and Julia had just looked up from her seam with something like a smile, when Morris burst into the house, eagerly calling for his uncle, and the next instant plunged into the room, waving in the air the evening paper.

It was indeed with great news that he came charged. The demise was announced of Lieutenant-General Sir Glasgow Biggar, K.C.S.I., K.C.M.G., etc., and the prize of the tontine now lay between the Finsbury brothers. Here was Morris's opportunity at last. The brothers had never, it is true, been cordial. When word came that Joseph was in Asia Minor, Masterman had expressed himself with irritation. " I call it simply indecent," he had said. " Mark my words—we shall hear of him next at the North Pole." And these bitter expressions had been reported to the traveller on his return. What was worse, Masterman had refused to attend the lecture on " Education : Its Aims, Objects, Purposes, and Desirability," although invited to the platform. Since then the brothers had not met. On the other hand, they never had openly quarrelled ; Joseph (by Morris's orders) was prepared to waive the advantage of his juniority ; Masterman had enjoyed all through life the reputation of a man neither greedy nor unfair. Here, then, were all the elements of compromise assembled ; and Morris, suddenly beholding his seven thousand eight hundred pounds restored to him, and himself dismissed from the vicissitudes of the leather trade, hastened the next morning to the office of his cousin Michael.

Michael was something of a public character. Launched upon the law at a very early age, and quite without protectors, he had become a trafficker in shady affairs. He was known to be the man for a lost cause ; it was known he could extract testimony from a stone, and interest from a gold mine ; and his office was besieged in consequence by all that numerous class of persons who have still some reputation to lose, and find themselves upon the point of

losing it ; by those who have made undesirable acquaintances, who have mislaid a compromising correspondence, or who are blackmailed by their own butlers. In private life Michael was a man of pleasure ; but it was thought his dire experience at the office had gone far to sober him, and it was known that (in the matter of investments) he preferred the solid to the brilliant. What was yet more to the purpose, he had been all his life a consistent scoffer at the Finsbury tontine.

It was therefore with little fear for the result that Morris presented himself before his cousin, and proceeded feverishly to set forth his scheme. For near upon a quarter of an hour the lawyer suffered him to dwell upon its manifest advantages uninterrupted. Then Michael rose from his seat, and, ringing for his clerk, uttered a single clause :

" It won't do, Morris."

It was in vain that the leather merchant pleaded and reasoned, and returned day after day to plead and reason. It was in vain that he offered a bonus of one thousand, of two thousand, of three thousand pounds ; in vain that he offered, in Joseph's name, to be content with only one-third of the pool. Still there came the same answer : " It won't do."

" I can't see the bottom of this," he said at last. " You answer none of my arguments ; you haven't a word to say. For my part, I believe it's malice."

The lawyer smiled at him benignly. " You may believe one thing," said he. " Whatever else I do, I am not going to gratify any of your curiosity. You see I am a trifle more communicative to-day, because this is our last interview upon the subject."

" Our last interview ! " cried Morris.

" The stirrup-cup, dear boy," returned Michael. " I can't have my business hours encroached upon. And, by the by, have you no business of your own ? Are there no convulsions in the leather trade ? "

"I believe it to be malice," repeated Morris doggedly. "You always hated and despised me from a boy."

"No, no—not hated," returned Michael soothingly. "I rather like you than otherwise; there's such a permanent surprise about you, you look so dark and attractive from a distance. Do you know that to the naked eye you look romantic?—like what they call a man with a history? And indeed, from all that I can hear, the history of the leather trade is full of incident."

"Yes," said Morris, disregarding these remarks, "it's no use coming here. I shall see your father."

"O no, you won't," said Michael. "Nobody shall see my father."

"I should like to know why," cried his cousin.

"I never make any secret of that," replied the lawyer. "He is too ill."

"If he is as ill as you say," cried the other, "the more reason for accepting my proposal. I *will* see him."

"Will you?" said Michael, and he rose and rang for his clerk.

It was now time, according to Sir Faraday Bond, the medical baronet whose name is so familiar at the foot of bulletins, that Joseph (the poor Golden Goose) should be removed into the purer air of Bournemouth; and for that uncharted wilderness of villas the family now shook off the dust of Bloomsbury; Julia delighted, because at Bournemouth she sometimes made acquaintances; John in despair, for he was a man of city tastes; Joseph indifferent where he was, so long as there was pen and ink and daily papers, and he could avoid martyrdom at the office; Morris himself, perhaps, not displeased to pretermit these visits to the city, and have a quiet time for thought. He was prepared for any sacrifice; all he desired was to get his money again and clear his feet of leather; and it would be strange, since he was so modest

in his desires, and the pool amounted to upward of a hundred and sixteen thousand pounds—it would be strange indeed if he could find no way of influencing Michael. "If I could only guess his reason," he repeated to himself; and by day, as he walked in Branksome Woods, and by night, as he turned upon his bed, and at meal-times, when he forgot to eat, and in the bathing machine, when he forgot to dress himself, that problem was constantly before him: Why had Michael refused?

At last, one night, he burst into his brother's room and woke him.

"What's all this?" asked John.

"Julia leaves this place to-morrow," replied Morris. "She must go up to town and get the house ready, and find servants. We shall all follow in three days."

"Oh, brayvo!" cried John. "But why?"

"I've found it out, John," returned his brother gently.

"It? What?" inquired John.

"Why Michael won't compromise," said Morris. "It's because he can't. It's because Masterman's dead, and he's keeping it dark."

"Golly!" cried the impressionable John. "But what's the use? Why does he do it, anyway?"

"To defraud us of the tontine," said his brother.

"He couldn't; you have to have a doctor's certificate," objected John.

"Did you never hear of venal doctors?" inquired Morris. "They're as common as blackberries: you can pick 'em up for three-pound-ten a head."

"I wouldn't do it under fifty if I were a sawbones," ejaculated John.

"And then Michael," continued Morris, "is in the very thick of it. All his clients have come to grief; his whole business is rotten eggs. If any man could arrange it, he could; and depend upon it, he has his plan all straight; and depend upon it, it's a good one, for he's clever, and be

damned to him! But I'm clever too; and I'm desperate. I lost seven thousand eight hundred pounds when I was an orphan at school."

"O, don't be tedious," interrupted John. "You've lost far more already trying to get it back."

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH MORRIS TAKES ACTION

Some days later, accordingly, the three males of this depressing family might have been observed (by a reader of G. P. R. James) taking their departure from the East Station of Bournemouth. The weather was raw and changeable, and Joseph was arrayed in consequence according to the principles of Sir Faraday Bond, a man no less strict (as is well known) on costume than on diet. There are few polite invalids who have not lived, or tried to live, by that punctilious physician's orders. "Avoid tea, madam," the reader has doubtless heard him say, "avoid tea, fried liver, antimonial wine, and bakers' bread. Retire nightly at 10.45; and clothe yourself (if you please) throughout in hygienic flannel. Externally, the fur of the marten is indicated. Do not forget to procure a pair of health boots at Messrs. Dall and Crumbie's." And he has probably called you back, even after you have paid your fee, to add with stentorian emphasis: "I had forgotten one caution: avoid kippered sturgeon as you would the very devil!" The unfortunate Joseph was cut to the pattern of Sir Faraday in every button; he was shod with the health boot; his suit was of genuine ventilating cloth; his shirt of hygienic flannel, a somewhat dingy fabric; and he was draped to the knees in the inevitable greatcoat of marten's fur. The very railway porters at Bournemouth (which was a favourite station of the doctor's) marked the old gentleman for a creature of Sir Faraday. There was but one evidence of personal taste, a vizarded forage-cap; from this form of headpiece, since he had fled from

a dying jackal on the plains of Ephesus, and weathered a bora in the Adriatic, nothing could divorce our traveller.

The three Finsburys mounted into their compartment, and fell immediately to quarrelling, a step unseemly in itself and (in this case) highly unfortunate for Morris. Had he lingered a moment longer by the window, this tale need never have been written. For he might then have observed (as the porters did not fail to do) the arrival of a second passenger in the uniform of Sir Faraday Bond. But he had other matters on hand, which he judged (God knows how erroneously) to be more important.

"I never heard of such a thing," he cried, resuming a discussion which had scarcely ceased all morning. "The bill is not yours; it is mine."

"It is payable to me," returned the old gentleman, with an air of bitter obstinacy. "I will do what I please with my own property."

The bill was one for eight hundred pounds, which had been given him at breakfast to endorse, and which he had simply pocketed.

"Hear him, Johnny!" cried Morris. "His property! the very clothes upon his back belong to me."

"Let him alone," said John. "I am sick of both of you."

"That is no way to speak of your uncle, sir," cried Joseph. "I will not endure this disrespect. You are a pair of exceedingly forward, impudent, and ignorant young men, and I have quite made up my mind to put an end to the whole business."

"O skittles!" said the graceful John.

But Morris was not so easy in his mind. This unusual act of insubordination had already troubled him; and these mutinous words now sounded ominously in his ears. He looked at the old gentleman uneasily. Upon one occasion, many years before, when Joseph was delivering a lecture, the audience had revolted in a body; finding their entertainer somewhat dry, they had taken the ques-

tion of amusement into their own hands ; and the lecturer (along with the board schoolmaster, the Baptist clergyman, and a working-man's candidate, who made up his body-guard) was ultimately driven from the scene. Morris had not been present on that fatal day ; if he had, he would have recognised a certain fighting glitter in his uncle's eye, and a certain chewing movement of his lips, as old acquaintances. But even to the inexpert these symptoms breathed of something dangerous.

" Well, well," said Morris. " I have no wish to bother you further till we get to London."

Joseph did not so much as look at him in answer ; with tremulous hands he produced a copy of the *British Mechanic*, and ostentatiously buried himself in its perusal.

" I wonder what can make him so cantankerous ? " reflected the nephew. " I don't like the look of it at all." And he dubiously scratched his nose.

The train travelled forth into the world, bearing along with it the customary freight of obliterated voyagers, and along with these old Joseph, affecting immersion in his paper, and John slumbering over the columns of the *Pink Un*, and Morris revolving in his mind a dozen grudges, and suspicions, and alarms. It passed Christ Church by the sea, Herne with its pinewoods, Ringwood on its mazy river. A little behind time, but not much for the South-Western, it drew up at the platform of a station, in the midst of the New Forest, the real name of which (in case the railway company " might have the law of me ") I shall veil under the *alias* of Browndean.

Many passengers put their heads to the window, and among the rest an old gentleman on whom I willingly dwell, for I am nearly done with him now, and (in the whole course of the present narrative) I am not in the least likely to meet another character so decent. His name is immaterial, not so his habits. He had passed his life wandering in a tweed suit on the continent of Europe ; and years of *Galignani's Messenger* having at

length undermined his eyesight, he suddenly remembered the rivers of Assyria and came to London to consult an oculist. From the oculist to the dentist, and from both to the physician, the step appears inevitable; presently he was in the hands of Sir Faraday, robed in ventilating cloth and sent to Bournemouth; and to that domineering baronet (who was his only friend upon his native soil) he was now returning to report. The case of these tweed-suited wanderers is unique. We have all seen them entering the table d'hôte (at Spezzia, or Grätz, or Venice) with a genteel melancholy and a faint appearance of having been to India and not succeeded. In the offices of many hundred hotels they are known by name; and yet, if the whole of this wandering cohort were to disappear tomorrow, their absence would be wholly unremarked. How much more, if only one—say this one in the ventilating cloth—should vanish! He had paid his bills at Bournemouth; his worldly effects were all in the van in two portmanteaux, and these after the proper interval would be sold as unclaimed baggage to a Jew; Sir Faraday's butler would be a half-crown poorer at the year's end, and the hotel-keepers of Europe about the same date would be mourning a small but quite observable decline in profits. And that would be literally all. Perhaps the old gentleman thought something of the sort, for he looked melancholy enough as he pulled his bare, grey head back into the carriage, and the train smoked under the bridge, and forth, with ever quickening speed, across the mingled heaths and woods of the New Forest.

Not many hundred yards beyond Browndean, however, a sudden jarring of brakes set everybody's teeth on edge, and there was a brutal stoppage. Morris Finsbury was aware of a confused uproar of voices, and sprang to the window. Women were screaming, men were tumbling from the windows on the track, the guard was crying to them to stay where they were; at the same time the train began to gather way and move very slowly backward

toward Browndean; and the next moment, all these various sounds were blotted out in the apocalyptic whistle and the thundering onslaught of the down express.

The actual collision Morris did not hear. Perhaps he fainted. He had a wild dream of having seen the carriage double up and fall to pieces like a pantomime trick; and sure enough, when he came to himself, he was lying on the bare earth and under the open sky. His head ached savagely; he carried his hand to his brow, and was not surprised to see it red with blood. The air was filled with an intolerable, throbbing roar, which he expected to find die away with the return of consciousness; and instead of that it seemed but to swell the louder and to pierce the more cruelly through his ears. It was a raging, bellowing thunder, like a boiler-riveting factory.

And now curiosity began to stir, and he sat up and looked about him. The track at this point ran in a sharp curve about a wooded hillock; all of the near side was heaped with the wreckage of the Bournemouth train; that of the express was mostly hidden by the trees; and just at the turn, under clouds of vomiting steam and piled about with cairns of living coal, lay what remained of the two engines, one upon the other. On the heathy margin of the line were many people running to and fro, and crying aloud as they ran, and many others lying motionless like sleeping tramps.

Morris suddenly drew an inference. "There has been an accident!" thought he, and was elated at his perspicacity. Almost at the same time his eye lighted on John, who lay close by as white as paper. "Poor old John! poor old cove!" he thought, the schoolboy expression popping forth from some forgotten treasury, and he took his brother's hand in his with childish tenderness. It was perhaps the touch that recalled him; at least John opened his eyes, sat suddenly up, and after several ineffectual movements of his lips, "What's the row?" said he, in a phantom voice.

The din of that devil's smithy still thundered in their ears. "Let us get away from that," Morris cried, and pointed to the vomit of steam that still spouted from the broken engines. And the pair helped each other up, and stood and quaked and wavered and stared about them at the scene of death.

Just then they were approached by a party of men who had already organised themselves for the purposes of rescue.

"Are you hurt?" cried one of these, a young fellow with the sweat streaming down his pallid face, and who, by the way he was treated, was evidently the doctor.

Morris shook his head, and the young man, nodding grimly, handed him a bottle of some spirit.

"Take a drink of that," he said; "your friend looks as if he needed it badly. We want every man we can get," he added; "there's terrible work before us, and nobody should shirk. If you can do no more, you can carry a stretcher."

The doctor was hardly gone before Morris, under the spur of the dram, awoke to the full possession of his wits.

"My God!" he cried. "Uncle Joseph!"

"Yes," said John, "where can he be? He can't be far off. I hope the old party isn't damaged."

"Come and help me to look," said Morris, with a snap of savage determination strangely foreign to his ordinary bearing; and then, for one moment, he broke forth. "If he's dead!" he cried, and shook his fist at heaven.

To and fro the brothers hurried, staring in the faces of the wounded, or turning the dead upon their backs. They must have thus examined forty people, and still there was no word of Uncle Joseph. But now the course of their search brought them near the centre of the collision, where the boilers were still blowing off steam with a deafening clamour. It was a part of the field not yet gleaned by the rescuing party. The ground, especially on the

margin of the wood, was full of inequalities—here a pit, there a hillock surmounted with a bush of furze. It was a place where many bodies might lie concealed, and they beat it like pointers after game. Suddenly Morris, who was leading, paused and reached forth his index with a tragic gesture. John followed the direction of his brother's hand.

In the bottom of a sandy hole lay something that had once been human. The face had suffered severely, and it was unrecognisable; but that was not required. The snowy hair, the coat of marten, the ventilating cloth, the hygienic flannel—everything down to the health boots from Messrs. Dall and Crumbie's, identified the body as that of Uncle Joseph. Only the forage-cap must have been lost in the convulsion, for the dead man was bare-headed.

"The poor old beggar!" said John, with a touch of natural feeling; "I would give ten pounds if we hadn't chivied him in the train!"

But there was no sentiment in the face of Morris as he gazed upon the dead. Gnawing his nails, with introverted eyes, his brow marked with the stamp of tragic indignation and tragic intellectual effort, he stood there silent. Here was a last injustice; he had been robbed while he was an orphan at school, he had been lashed to a decadent leather business, he had been saddled with Miss Hazeltine, his cousin had been defrauding him of the tontine, and he had borne all this, we might almost say, with dignity, and now they had gone and killed his uncle!

"Here!" he said suddenly, "take his heels, we must get him into the woods. I'm not going to have anybody find this."

"O, fudge!" said John, "where's the use?"

"Do what I tell you," spirted Morris, as he took the corpse by the shoulders. "Am I to carry him myself?"

They were close upon the borders of the wood; in ten or twelve paces they were under cover; and a little

farther back, in a sandy clearing of the trees, they laid their burthen down, and stood and looked at it with loathing.

"What do you mean to do?" whispered John.

"Bury him, to be sure!" responded Morris, and he opened his pocket-knife and began feverishly to dig.

"You'll never make a hand of it with that," objected the other.

"If you won't help me, you cowardly shirk," screamed Morris, "you can go to the devil!"

"It's the childishest folly," said John; "but no man shall call me a coward," and he began to help his brother grudgingly.

The soil was sandy and light, but matted with the roots of the surrounding firs. Gorse tore their hands; and as they baled the sand from the grave, it was often discoloured with their blood. An hour passed of unremitting energy upon the part of Morris, of lukewarm help on that of John; and still the trench was barely nine inches in depth. Into this the body was rudely flung: sand was piled upon it, and then more sand must be dug, and gorse had to be cut to pile on that; and still from one end of the sordid mound a pair of feet projected and caught the light upon their patent-leather toes. But by this time the nerves of both were shaken; even Morris had enough of his grisly task; and they skulked off like animals into the thickest of the neighbouring covert.

"It's the best that we can do," said Morris, sitting down.

"And now," said John, "perhaps you'll have the politeness to tell me what it's all about."

"Upon my word," cried Morris, "if you do not understand for yourself, I almost despair of telling you."

"O, of course it's some rot about the tontine," returned the other. "But it's the merest nonsense. We've lost it, and there's an end."

"I tell you," said Morris, "Uncle Masterman is dead. I know it, there's a voice that tells me so."

"Well, and so is Uncle Joseph," said John.

"He's not dead, unless I choose," returned Morris.

"And come to that," cried John, "if you're right, and Uncle Masterman's been dead ever so long, all we have to do is to tell the truth and expose Michael."

"You seem to think Michael is a fool," sneered Morris. "Can't you understand he's been preparing this fraud for years? He has the whole thing ready: the nurse, the doctor, the undertaker, all bought, the certificate all ready but the date! Let him get wind of this business, and you mark my words, Uncle Masterman will die in two days and be buried in a week. But see here, Johnny; what Michael can do, I can do. If he plays a game of bluff, so can I. If his father is to live for ever, by God, so shall my uncle!"

"It's illegal, ain't it?" said John.

"A man must have *some* moral courage," replied Morris with dignity.

"And then suppose you're wrong? Suppose Uncle Masterman's alive and kicking?"

"Well, even then," responded the plotter, "we are no worse off than we were before; in fact, we're better. Uncle Masterman must die some day; as long as Uncle Joseph was alive, he might have died any day; but we're out of all that trouble now: there's no sort of limit to the game that I propose—it can be kept up till Kingdom Come."

"If I could only see how you meant to set about it!" sighed John. "But you know, Morris, you always were such a bungler."

"I'd like to know what I ever bungled," cried Morris; "I have the best collection of signet rings in London."

"Well, you know, there's the leather business," suggested the other. "That's considered rather a hash."

It was a mark of singular self-control in Morris that he suffered this to pass unchallenged, and even unresented.

"About the business in hand," said he, "once we can get him up to Bloomsbury, there's no sort of trouble. We bury him in the cellar, which seems made for it; and then all I have to do is to start out and find a venal doctor."

"Why can't we leave him where he is?" asked John.

"Because we know nothing about the country," retorted Morris. "This wood may be a regular lovers' walk. Turn your mind to the real difficulty. How are we to get him up to Bloomsbury?"

Various schemes were mooted and rejected. The railway station at Browndean was, of course, out of the question, for it would now be a centre of curiosity and gossip, and (of all things) they would be least able to despatch a dead body without remark. John feebly proposed getting an ale-cask and sending it as beer, but the objections to this course were so overwhelming that Morris scorned to answer. The purchase of a packing-case seemed equally hopeless, for why should two gentlemen without baggage of any kind require a packing-case? They would be more likely to require clean linen.

"We are working on wrong lines," cried Morris at last. "The thing must be gone about more carefully. Suppose now," he added excitedly, speaking by fits and starts, as if he were thinking aloud, "suppose we rent a cottage by the month. A householder can buy a packing-case without remark. Then suppose we clear the people out to-day, get the packing-case to-night, and to-morrow I hire a carriage—or a cart that we could drive ourselves—and take the box, or whatever we get, to Ringwood or Lyndhurst or somewhere; we could label it 'specimens,' don't you see? Johnny, I believe I've hit the nail at last."

"Well, it sounds more feasible," admitted John.

"Of course we must take assumed names," continued Morris. "It would never do to keep our own. What

do you say to 'Masterman' itself? It sounds quiet and dignified."

"I will *not* take the name of Masterman," returned his brother; "you may, if you like. I shall call myself Vance—the Great Vance; positively the last six nights. There's some go in a name like that."

"Vance!" cried Morris. "Do you think we are playing a pantomime for our amusement? There was never anybody named Vance who wasn't a music-hall singer."

"That's the beauty of it," returned John; "it gives you some standing at once. You may call yourself Fortescue till all's blue, and nobody cares; but to be Vance gives a man a natural nobility."

"But there's lots of other theatrical names," cried Morris. "Leybourne, Irving, Brough, Toole——"

"Devil a one will I take!" returned his brother. "I am going to have my little lark out of this as well as you."

"Very well," said Morris, who perceived that John was determined to carry his point, "I shall be Robert Vance."

"And I shall be George Vance," cried John, "the only original George Vance! Rally round the only original!"

Repairing as well as they were able the disorder of their clothes, Finsbury brothers returned to Browndean by a circuitous route in quest of luncheon and a suitable cottage. It is not always easy to drop at a moment's notice on a furnished residence in a retired locality; but fortune presently introduced our adventurers to a deaf carpenter, a man rich in cottages of the required description, and unaffectedly eager to supply their wants. The second place they visited, standing, as it did, about a mile and a half from any neighbours, caused them to exchange a glance of hope. On a nearer view, the place was not without depressing features. It stood in a marshy-looking hollow of a heath; tall trees obscured its windows; the thatch visibly rotted on the rafters; and the walls were

stained with splashes of unwholesome green. The rooms were small, the ceilings low, the furniture merely nominal; a strange chill and a haunting smell of damp pervaded the kitchen; and the bedroom boasted only of one bed.

Morris, with a view to cheapening the place, remarked on this defect.

"Well," returned the man, "if you can't sleep two abed, you'd better take a villa residence."

"And then," pursued Morris, "there's no water. How do you get your water?"

"We fill *that* from the spring," replied the carpenter, pointing to a big barrel that stood beside the door. "The spring ain't so *very* far off, after all, and it's easy brought in buckets. There's a bucket there."

Morris nudged his brother as they examined the water-butt. It was new, and very solidly constructed for its office. If anything had been wanting to decide them, this eminently practical barrel would have turned the scale. A bargain was promptly struck, the month's rent was paid upon the nail, and about an hour later Finsbury brothers might have been observed returning to the blighted cottage, having along with them the key, which was the symbol of their tenancy, a spirit-lamp, with which they fondly told themselves they would be able to cook, a pork pie of suitable dimensions, and a quart of the worst whisky in Hampshire. Nor was this all they had effected; already (under the plea that they were landscape-painters) they had hired for dawn on the morrow a light but solid two-wheeled cart; so that when they entered in their new character, they were able to tell themselves that the back of the business was already broken.

John proceeded to get tea; while Morris, foraging about the house, was presently delighted by discovering the lid of the water-butt upon the kitchen shelf. Here, then, was the packing-case complete; in the absence of straw, the blankets (which he himself, at least, had not the smallest intention of using for their present purpose)

would exactly take the place of packing; and Morris, as the difficulties began to vanish from his path, rose almost to the brink of exultation. There was, however, one difficulty not yet faced, one upon which his whole scheme depended. Would John consent to remain alone in the cottage? He had not yet dared to put the question.

It was with high good-humour that the pair sat down to the deal table, and proceeded to fall-to on the pork pie. Morris retailed the discovery of the lid, and the Great Vance was pleased to applaud by beating on the table with his fork in true music-hall style.

"That's the dodge," he cried. "I always said a water-butt was what you wanted for this business."

"Of course," said Morris, thinking this a favourable opportunity to prepare his brother, "of course you must stay on in this place till I give the word; I'll give out that uncle is resting in the New Forest. It would not do for both of us to appear in London; we could never conceal the absence of the old man."

John's jaw dropped.

"O, come!" he cried. "You can stay in this hole yourself. I won't."

The colour came into Morris's cheeks. He saw that he must win his brother at any cost.

"You must please remember, Johnny," he said, "the amount of the tontine. If I succeed, we shall have each fifty thousand to place to our bank account; ay, and nearer sixty."

"But if you fail," returned John, "what then? What'll be the colour of our bank account in that case?"

"I will pay all expenses," said Morris, with an inward struggle; "you shall lose nothing."

"Well," said John, with a laugh, "if the ex-s are yours, and half-profits mine, I don't mind remaining here for a couple of days."

"A couple of days!" cried Morris, who was beginning to get angry and controlled himself with difficulty;

" why, you would do more to win five pounds on a horse-race ! "

" Perhaps I would," returned the Great Vance ; " it's the artistic temperament."

" This is monstrous ! " burst out Morris. " I take all risks ; I pay all expenses ; I divide profits ; and you won't take the slightest pains to help me. It's not decent ; it's not honest ; it's not even kind."

" But suppose," objected John, who was considerably impressed by his brother's vehemence, " suppose that Uncle Masterman is alive after all, and lives ten years longer ; must I rot here all that time ? "

" Of course not," responded Morris, in a more conciliatory tone ; " I only ask a month at the outside ; and if Uncle Masterman is not dead by that time you can go abroad."

" Go abroad ? " repeated John eagerly. " Why shouldn't I go at once ? Tell 'em that Joseph and I are seeing life in Paris."

" Nonsense," said Morris.

" Well, but look here," said John ; " it's this house, it's such a pig-sty, it's so dreary and damp. You said yourself that it was damp."

" Only to the carpenter," Morris distinguished, " and that was to reduce the rent. But really, you know, now we're in it, I've seen worse."

" And what am I to do ? " complained the victim. " How can I entertain a friend ? "

" My dear Johnny, if you don't think the tontine worth a little trouble, say so, and I'll give the business up."

" You're dead certain of the figures, I suppose ? " asked John. " Well "—with a deep sigh—" send me the *Pink Un* and all the comic papers regularly. I'll face the music."

As afternoon drew on, the cottage breathed more thrillingly of its native marsh ; a creeping chill inhabited its chambers ; the fire smoked, and a shower of rain,

coming up from the channel on a slant of wind, tingled on the window-panes. At intervals, when the gloom deepened toward despair, Morris would produce the whisky-bottle, and at first John welcomed the diversion —not for long. It has been said this spirit was the worst in Hampshire; only those acquainted with the county can appreciate the force of that superlative; and at length even the Great Vance (who was no connoisseur) waved the decoction from his lips. The approach of dusk, feebly combated with a single tallow candle, added a touch of tragedy; and John suddenly stopped whistling through his fingers—an art to the practice of which he had been reduced—and bitterly lamented his concessions.

"I can't stay here a month," he cried. "No one could. The thing's nonsense, Morris. The parties that lived in the Bastille would rise against a place like this."

With an admirable affectation of indifference, Morris proposed a game of pitch-and-toss. To what will not the diplomatist condescend! It was John's favourite game; indeed his only game—he had found all the rest too intellectual—and he played it with equal skill and good fortune. To Morris himself, on the other hand, the whole business was detestable; he was a bad pitcher, he had no luck in tossing, and he was one who suffered torments when he lost. But John was in a dangerous humour, and his brother was prepared for any sacrifice.

By seven o'clock, Morris, with incredible agony, had lost a couple of half-crowns. Even with the tontine before his eyes, this was as much as he could bear; and, remarking that he would take his revenge some other time, he proposed a bit of supper and a grog.

Before they had made an end of this refreshment it was time to be at work. A bucket of water for present necessities was withdrawn from the water-butt, which was then emptied and rolled before the kitchen fire to dry; and the two brothers set forth on their adventure under a starless heaven.

CHAPTER III

THE LECTURER AT LARGE

Whether mankind is really partial to happiness is an open question. Not a month passes by but some cherished son runs off into the merchant service, or some valued husband decamps to Texas with a lady help; clergymen have fled from their parishioners; and even judges have been known to retire. To an open mind, it will appear (upon the whole) less strange that Joseph Finsbury should have been led to entertain ideas of escape. His lot (I think we may say) was not a happy one. My friend, Mr. Morris, with whom I travel up twice or thrice a week from Snaresbrook Park, is certainly a gentleman whom I esteem; but he was scarce a model nephew. As for John, he is of course an excellent fellow; but if he was the only link that bound one to a home, I think the most of us would vote for foreign travel. In the case of Joseph, John (if he were a link at all) was not the only one; endearing bonds had long enchained the old gentleman to Bloomsbury; and by these expressions I do not in the least refer to Julia Hazeltine (of whom, however, he was fond enough), but to that collection of manuscript note-books in which his life lay buried. That he should ever have made up his mind to separate himself from these collections, and go forth upon the world with no other resources than his memory supplied, is a circumstance highly pathetic in itself, and but little creditable to the wisdom of his nephews.

The design, or at least the temptation, was already some months old; and when a bill for eight hundred

pounds, payable to himself, was suddenly placed in Joseph's hand, it brought matters to an issue. He retained that bill, which, to one of his frugality, meant wealth; and he promised himself to disappear among the crowds at Waterloo, or (if that should prove impossible) to slink out of the house in the course of the evening and melt like a dream into the millions of London. By a peculiar interposition of Providence and railway mismanagement he had not so long to wait.

He was one of the first to come to himself and scramble to his feet after the Browndean catastrophe, and he had no sooner remarked his prostrate nephews than he understood his opportunity and fled. A man of upwards of seventy, who has just met with a railway accident, and who is cumbered besides with the full uniform of Sir Faraday Bond, is not very likely to flee far, but the wood was close at hand and offered the fugitive at least a temporary covert. Hither, then, the old gentleman skipped with extraordinary expedition, and, being somewhat winded and a good deal shaken, here he lay down in a convenient grove and was presently overwhelmed by slumber. The way of fate is often highly entertaining to the looker-on, and it is certainly a pleasant circumstance, that while Morris and John were delving in the sand to conceal the body of a total stranger, their uncle lay in dreamless sleep a few hundred yards deeper in the wood.

He was awakened by the jolly note of a bugle from the neighbouring high road, where a *char-à-banc* was bowling by with some belated tourists. The sound cheered his old heart, it directed his steps into the bargain, and soon he was on the highway, looking east and west from under his vizor, and doubtfully revolving what he ought to do. A deliberate sound of wheels arose in the distance, and then a cart was seen approaching, well filled with parcels, driven by a good-natured looking man on a double bench, and displaying on a board the legend, "I. Chandler, carrier." In the infamously prosaic mind of Mr. Finsbury,

certain streaks of poetry survived and were still efficient ; they had carried him to Asia Minor as a giddy youth of forty, and now, in the first hours of his recovered freedom, they suggested to him the idea of continuing his flight in Mr. Chandler's cart. It would be cheap ; properly broached, it might even cost nothing, and, after years of mittens and hygienic flannel, his heart leaped out to meet the notion of exposure.

Mr. Chandler was perhaps a little puzzled to find so old a gentleman, so strangely clothed, and begging for a lift on so retired a roadside. But he was a good-natured man, glad to do a service, and so he took the stranger up ; and he had his own idea of civility, and so he asked no questions. Silence, in fact, was quite good enough for Mr. Chandler ; but the cart had scarcely begun to move forward ere he found himself involved in a one-sided conversation.

" I can see," began Mr. Finsbury, " by the mixture of parcels and boxes that are contained in your cart, each marked with its individual label, and by the good Flemish mare you drive, that you occupy the post of carrier in that great English system of transport which, with all its defects, is the pride of our country."

" Yes, sir," returned Mr. Chandler vaguely, for he hardly knew what to reply ; " them parcels posts has done us carriers a world of harm."

" I am not a prejudiced man," continued Joseph Finsbury. " As a young man I travelled much. Nothing was too small or too obscure for me to acquire. At sea I studied seamanship, learned the complicated knots employed by mariners, and acquired the technical terms. At Naples, I would learn the art of making macaroni ; at Nice, the principles of making candied fruit. I never went to the opera without first buying the book of the piece, and making myself acquainted with the principal airs by picking them out on the piano with one finger."

" You must have seen a deal, sir," remarked the carrier,

touching up his horse; "I wish I could have had your advantages."

"Do you know how often the word whip occurs in the Old Testament?" continued the old gentleman. "One hundred and (if I remember exactly) forty-seven times."

"Do it indeed, sir?" said Mr. Chandler. "I never should have thought it."

"The Bible contains three million five hundred and one thousand two hundred and forty-nine letters. Of verses I believe there are upward of eighteen thousand. There have been many editions of the Bible; Wiclif was the first to introduce it into England about the year 1300. The 'Paragraph Bible,' as it is called, is a well-known edition, and is so called because it is divided into paragraphs. The 'Breeches Bible' is another well-known instance, and gets its name either because it was printed by one Breeches, or because the place of publication bore that name."

The carrier remarked drily that he thought that was only natural, and turned his attention to the more congenial task of passing a cart of hay; it was a matter of some difficulty, for the road was narrow, and there was a ditch on either hand.

"I perceive," began Mr. Finsbury, when they had successfully passed the cart, "that you hold your reins with one hand; you should employ two."

"Well, I like that!" cried the carrier contemptuously. "Why?"

"You do not understand," continued Mr. Finsbury. "What I tell you is a scientific fact, and reposes on the theory of the lever, a branch of mechanics. There are some very interesting little shilling books upon the field of study, which I should think a man in your station would take a pleasure to read. But I am afraid you have not cultivated the art of observation; at least we have now driven together for some time, and I cannot remember that you have contributed a single fact. This

is a very false principle, my good man. For instance, I do not know if you observed that (as you passed the hay-cart man) you took your left ? "

" Of course I did," cried the carrier, who was now getting belligerent ; " he'd have the law on me if I hadn't."

" In France, now," resumed the old man, " and also, I believe, in the United States of America, you would have taken the right."

" I would not," cried Mr. Chandler indignantly. " I would have taken the left."

" I observe again," continued Mr. Finsbury, scorning to reply, " that you mend the dilapidated parts of your harness with string. I have always protested against this carelessness and slovenliness of the English poor. In an essay that I once read before an appreciative audience——"

" It ain't string," said the carrier sullenly, " it's pack-thread."

" I have always protested," resumed the old man, " that in their private and domestic life, as well as in their labouring career, the lower classes of this country are improvident, thriftless, and extravagant. A stitch in time——"

" Who the devil *are* the lower classes ? " cried the carrier. " You are the lower classes yourself ! If I thought you were a blooming aristocrat, I shouldn't have given you a lift."

The words were uttered with undisguised ill-feeling ; it was plain the pair were not congenial, and further conversation, even to one of Mr. Finsbury's pathetic loquacity, was out of the question. With an angry gesture, he pulled down the brim of the forage-cap over his eyes, and, producing a note-book and a blue pencil from one of his innermost pockets, soon became absorbed in calculations.

On his part the carrier fell to whistling with fresh zest ; and if (now and again) he glanced at the companion of his drive, it was with mingled feelings of triumph and alarm—

triumph because he had succeeded in arresting that prodigy of speech, and alarm lest (by any accident) it should begin again. Even the shower, which presently overtook and passed them, was endured by both in silence; and it was still in silence that they drove at length into Southampton.

Dusk had fallen; the shop windows glimmered forth into the streets of the old seaport; in private houses lights were kindled for the evening meal; and Mr. Finsbury began to think complacently of his night's lodging. He put his papers by, cleared his throat, and looked doubtfully at Mr. Chandler.

"Will you be civil enough," said he, "to recommend me to an inn?"

Mr. Chandler pondered for a moment.

"Well," he said at last, "I wonder how about the 'Tregonwell Arms.'"

"The 'Tregonwell Arms' will do very well," returned the old man, "if it's clean and cheap, and the people civil."

"I wasn't thinking so much of you," returned Mr. Chandler thoughtfully. "I was thinking of my friend Watts as keeps the 'ouse; he's a friend of mine, you see, and he helped me through my trouble last year. And I was thinking, would it be fair-like on Watts to saddle him with an old party like you, who might be the death of him with general information. Would it be fair to the 'ouse?" inquired Mr. Chandler, with an air of candid appeal.

"Mark me," cried the old gentleman with spirit. "It was kind in you to bring me here for nothing, but it gives you no right to address me in such terms. Here's a shilling for your trouble; and, if you do not choose to set me down at the 'Tregonwell Arms,' I can find it for myself."

Chandler was surprised and a little startled; muttering something apologetic, he returned the shilling, drove in silence through several intricate lanes and small streets,

drew up at length before the bright windows of an inn, and called loudly for Mr. Watts.

"Is that you, Jem?" cried a hearty voice from the stableyard. "Come in and warm yourself."

"I only stopped here," Mr. Chandler explained, "to let down an old gent that wants food and lodging. Mind, I warn you agin him; he's worse nor a temperance lecturer."

Mr. Finsbury dismounted with difficulty, for he was cramped with his long drive, and the shaking he had received in the accident. The friendly Mr. Watts, in spite of the carter's scarcely agreeable introduction, treated the old gentleman with the utmost courtesy, and led him into the back parlour, where there was a big fire burning in the grate. Presently a table was spread in the same room, and he was invited to seat himself before a stewed fowl—somewhat the worse for having seen service before—and a big pewter mug of ale from the tap.

He rose from supper a giant refreshed; and, changing his seat to one nearer the fire, began to examine the other guests with an eye to the delights of oratory. There were near a dozen present, all men, and (as Joseph exulted to perceive) all working men. Often already had he seen cause to bless that appetite for disconnected fact and rotatory argument which is so marked a character of the mechanic. But even an audience of working men has to be courted, and there was no man more deeply versed in the necessary arts than Joseph Finsbury. He placed his glasses on his nose, drew from his pocket a bundle of papers, and spread them before him on a table. He crumpled them, he smoothed them out; now he skimmed them over, apparently well pleased with their contents; now, with tapping pencil and contracted brows, he seemed maturely to consider some particular statement. A stealthy glance about the room assured him of the success of his manœuvres; all eyes were turned on the performer, mouths were open, pipes hung suspended; the birds

were charmed. At the same moment the entrance of Mr. Watts afforded him an opportunity.

"I observe," said he, addressing the landlord, but taking at the same time the whole room into his confidence with an encouraging look, "I observe that some of these gentlemen are looking with curiosity in my direction; and certainly it is unusual to see anyone immersed in literary and scientific labours in the public apartment of an inn. I have here some calculations I made this morning upon the cost of living in this and other countries—a subject, I need scarcely say, highly interesting to the working classes. I have calculated a scale of living for incomes of eighty, one hundred and sixty, two hundred, and two hundred and forty pounds a year. I must confess that the income of eighty pounds has somewhat baffled me, and the others are not so exact as I could wish; for the price of washing varies largely in foreign countries, and the different cokes, coals, and firewoods fluctuate surprisingly. I will read my researches, and I hope you won't scruple to point out to me any little errors that I may have committed either from oversight or ignorance. I will begin, gentlemen, with the income of eighty pounds a year."

Whereupon the old gentleman, with less compassion than he would have had for brute beasts, delivered himself of all his tedious calculations. As he occasionally gave nine versions of a single income, placing the imaginary person in London, Paris, Bagdad, Spitzbergen, Bassorah, Heligoland, the Scilly Islands, Brighton, Cincinnati, and Nijni-Novgorod, with an appropriate outfit for each locality, it is no wonder that his hearers look back on that evening as the most tiresome they ever spent.

Long before Mr. Finsbury had reached Nijni-Novgorod with the income of one hundred and sixty pounds, the company had dwindled and faded away to a few old topers and the bored but affable Watts. There was a constant stream of customers from the outer world, but so soon as they were served they drank their liquor quickly and

departed with the utmost celerity for the next public-house.

By the time the young man with two hundred a year was vegetating in the Scilly Islands, Mr. Watts was left alone with the economist; and that imaginary person had scarce commenced life at Brighton before the last of his pursuers desisted from the chase.

Mr. Finsbury slept soundly after the manifold fatigues of the day. He rose late, and, after a good breakfast, ordered the bill. Then it was that he made a discovery which has been made by many others, both before and since: that it is one thing to order your bill, and another to discharge it. The items were moderate and (what does not always follow) the total small; but, after the most sedulous review of all his pockets, one and nine pence halfpenny appeared to be the total of the old gentleman's available assets. He asked to see Mr. Watts.

"Here is a bill on London for eight hundred pounds," said Mr. Finsbury, as that worthy appeared. "I am afraid, unless you choose to discount it yourself, it may detain me a day or two till I can get it cashed."

Mr. Watts looked at the bill, turned it over, and dogs-eared it with his fingers. "It will keep you a day or two?" he said, repeating the old man's words. "You have no other money with you?"

"Some trifling change," responded Joseph. "Nothing to speak of."

"Then you can send it me; I should be pleased to trust you."

"To tell the truth," answered the old gentleman, "I am more than half inclined to stay; I am in need of funds."

"If a loan of ten shillings would help you, it is at your service," responded Watts, with eagerness.

"No, I think I would rather stay," said the old man, "and get my bill discounted."

"You shall not stay in my house," cried Mr. Watts.

" This is the last time you shall have a bed at the ' Tregonwell Arms.' "

" I insist upon remaining," replied Mr. Finsbury, with spirit ; " I remain by Act of Parliament ; turn me out if you dare."

" Then pay your bill," said Mr. Watts.

" Take that," cried the old man, tossing him the negotiable bill.

" It is not legal tender," replied Mr. Watts. " You must leave my house at once."

" You cannot appreciate the contempt I feel for you, Mr. Watts," said the old gentleman, resigning himself to circumstances. " But you shall feel it in one way : I refuse to pay my bill."

" I don't care for your bill," responded Mr. Watts. " What I want is your absence."

" That you shall have ! " said the old gentleman, and, taking up his forage-cap as he spoke, he crammed it on his head. " Perhaps you are too insolent," he added, " to inform me of the time of the next London train ? "

" It leaves in three-quarters of an hour," returned the innkeeper with alacrity. " You can easily catch it."

Joseph's position was one of considerable weakness. On the one hand, it would have been well to avoid the direct line of railway, since it was there he might expect his nephews to lie in wait for his recapture ; on the other, it was highly desirable, it was even strictly needful, to get the bill discounted ere it should be stopped. To London, therefore, he decided to proceed on the first train ; and there remained but one point to be considered, how to pay his fare.

Joseph's nails were never clean ; he ate almost entirely with his knife. I doubt if you could say he had the manners of a gentleman ; but he had better than that, a touch of genuine dignity. Was it from his stay in Asia Minor ? Was it from a strain in the Finsbury blood sometimes alluded to by customers ? At least, when he presented

himself before the station-master, his salaam was truly Oriental, palm-trees appeared to crowd about the little office, and the simoom or the bulbul—but I leave this image to persons better acquainted with the East. His appearance, besides, was highly in his favour; the uniform of Sir Faraday, however inconvenient and conspicuous, was, at least, a costume in which no swindler could have hoped to prosper; and the exhibition of a valuable watch and a bill for eight hundred pounds completed what deportment had begun. A quarter of an hour later, when the train came up, Mr. Finsbury was introduced to the guard and installed in a first-class compartment, the station-master smilingly assuming all responsibility.

As the old gentleman sat waiting the moment of departure, he was the witness of an incident strangely connected with the fortunes of his house. A packing-case of cyclopean bulk was borne along the platform by some dozen of tottering porters, and ultimately, to the delight of a considerable crowd, hoisted on board the van. It is often the cheering task of the historian to direct attention to the designs and (if it may be reverently said) the artifices of Providence. In the luggage van, as Joseph was borne out of the station of Southampton East upon his way to London, the egg of his romance lay (so to speak) unhatched. The huge packing-case was directed to lie at Waterloo till called for, and addressed to one "William Dent Pitman"; and the very next article, a goodly barrel jammed into the corner of the van, bore the superscription, "M. Finsbury, 16 John Street, Bloomsbury. Carriage paid."

In this juxtaposition, the train of powder was prepared; and there was now wanting only an idle hand to fire it off.

CHAPTER IV

THE MAGISTRATE IN THE LUGGAGE VAN

The city of Winchester is famed for a cathedral, a bishop —but he was unfortunately killed some years ago while riding—a public school, a considerable assortment of the military, and the deliberate passage of the trains of the London and South-Western line. These and many similar associations would have doubtless crowded on the mind of Joseph Finsbury; but his spirit had at that time flitted from the railway compartment to a heaven of populous lecture-halls and endless oratory. His body, in the meanwhile, lay doubled on the cushions, the forage-cap rakishly tilted back after the fashion of those that lie in wait for nursery-maids, the poor old face quiescent, one arm clutching to his heart *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper.*

To him, thus unconscious, enter and exeunt again a pair of voyagers. These two had saved the train and no more. A tandem urged to its last speed, an act of something closely bordering on brigandage at the ticket office, and a spasm of running, had brought them on the platform just as the engine uttered its departing snort. There was but one carriage easily within their reach; and they had sprung into it, and the leader and elder already had his feet upon the floor, when he observed Mr. Finsbury.

"Good God!" he cried. "Uncle Joseph! This'll never do."

And he backed out, almost upsetting his companion, and once more closed the door upon the sleeping patriarch.

The next moment the pair had jumped into the baggage van.

"What's the row about your Uncle Joseph?" inquired the younger traveller, mopping his brow. "Does he object to smoking?"

"I don't know that there's anything the row with him," returned the other. "He's by no means the first comer, my Uncle Joseph, I can tell you! Very respectable old gentleman; interested in leather; been to Asia Minor; no family, no assets—and a tongue, my dear Wickham, sharper than a serpent's tooth."

"Cantankerous old party, eh?" suggested Wickham.

"Not in the least," cried the other; "only a man with a solid talent for being a bore; rather cheery I dare say, on a desert island, but on a railway journey insupportable. You should hear him on Tonti, the ass that started tontines. He's incredible on Tonti."

"By Jove!" cried Wickham, "then you're one of these Finsbury tontine fellows. I hadn't a guess of that."

"Ah!" said the other, "do you know that old boy in the carriage is worth a hundred thousand pounds to me? There he was asleep, and nobody there but you! But I spared him, because I'm a Conservative in politics."

Mr. Wickham, pleased to be in a luggage van, was flitting to and fro like a gentlemanly butterfly.

"By Jingo!" he cried, "here's something for you! 'M. Finsbury, 16 John Street, Bloomsbury, London.' M. stands for Michael, you sly dog; you keep two establishments, do you?"

"O, that's Morris," responded Michael from the other end of the van, where he had found a comfortable seat upon some sacks. "He's a little cousin of mine. I like him myself, because he's afraid of me. He's one of the ornaments of Bloomsbury, and has a collection of some kind—birds' eggs or something that's supposed to be curious. I bet it's nothing to my clients!"

"What a lark it would be to play billy with the labels!" chuckled Mr. Wickham. "By George, here's a tack-

hammer! We might send all these things skipping about the premises like what's-his-name!"

At this moment, the guard, surprised by the sound of voices, opened the door of his little cabin.

"You had best step in here, gentlemen," said he, when he had heard their story.

"Won't you come, Wickham?" asked Michael.

"Catch me—I want to travel in a van," replied the youth.

And so the door of communication was closed; and for the rest of the run Mr. Wickham was left alone over his diversions on the one side, and on the other Michael and the guard were closeted together in familiar talk.

"I can get you a compartment here, sir," observed the official, as the train began to slacken speed before Bishopstoke station. "You had best get out at my door, and I can bring your friend."

Mr. Wickham, whom we left (as the reader has shrewdly suspected) beginning to "play billy" with the labels in the van, was a young gentleman of much wealth, a pleasing but sandy exterior, and a highly vacant mind. Not many months before, he had contrived to get himself blackmailed by the family of a Wallachian Hospodar, resident for political reasons in the gay city of Paris. A common friend (to whom he had confided his distress) recommended him to Michael; and the lawyer was no sooner in possession of the facts than he instantly assumed the offensive, fell on the flank of the Wallachian forces, and, in the inside of three days, had the satisfaction to behold them routed and fleeing for the Danube. It is no business of ours to follow them on this retreat, over which the police were so obliging as to preside paternally. Thus relieved from what he loved to refer to as the Bulgarian Atrocity, Mr. Wickham returned to London with the most unbounded and embarrassing gratitude and admiration for his saviour. These sentiments were not repaid either in kind or degree; indeed, Michael was a trifle ashamed of his new client's

friendship ; it had taken many invitations to get him to Winchester and Wickham Manor ; but he had gone at last, and was now returning. It has been remarked by some judicious thinker (possibly J. F. Smith) that Providence despises to employ no instrument, however humble ; and it is now plain to the dullest that both Mr. Wickham and the Wallachian Hospodar were liquid lead and wedges in the hand of Destiny.

Smitten with the desire to shine in Michael's eyes and show himself a person of original humour and resources, the young gentleman (who was a magistrate, more by token, in his native county) was no sooner alone in the van than he fell upon the labels with all the zeal of a reformer ; and, when he rejoined the lawyer at Bishopstoke, his face was flushed with his exertions, and his cigar, which he had suffered to go out was almost bitten in two.

" By George, but this has been a lark ! " he cried. " I've sent the wrong thing to everybody in England. These cousins of yours have a packing-case as big as a house. I've muddled the whole business up to that extent, Finsbury, that if it were to get out it's my belief we should get lynched."

It was useless to be serious with Mr. Wickham. " Take care," said Michael. " I am getting tired of your perpetual scrapes ; my reputation is beginning to suffer."

" Your reputation will be all gone before you finish with me," replied his companion with a grin. " Clap it in the bill, my boy. ' For total loss of reputation, six and eightpence.' But," continued Mr. Wickham with more seriousness, " could I be bowled out of the Commission for this little jest ? I know it's small, but I like to be a J.P. Speaking as a professional man, do you think there's any risk ? "

" What does it matter ? " responded Michael, " they'll chuck you out sooner or later. Somehow you don't give the effect of being a good magistrate."

"I only wish I was a solicitor," retorted his companion, "instead of a poor devil of a country gentleman. Suppose we start one of those tontine affairs ourselves; I to pay five hundred a year, and you to guarantee me against every misfortune except illness or marriage."

"It strikes me," remarked the lawyer with a meditative laugh, as he lighted a cigar, "it strikes me that you must be a cursed nuisance in this world of ours."

"Do you really think so, Finsbury?" responded the magistrate, leaning back in his cushions, delighted with the compliment. "Yes, I suppose I am a nuisance. But, mind you, I have a stake in the country: don't forget that, dear boy."

CHAPTER V

MR. GIDEON FORSYTH AND THE GIGANTIC BOX

It has been mentioned that at Bournemouth Julia sometimes made acquaintances ; it is true she had but a glimpse of them before the doors of John Street closed again upon its captives, but the glimpse was sometimes exhilarating, and the consequent regret was tempered with hope. Among those whom she had thus met a year before was a young barrister of the name of Gideon Forsyth.

About three o'clock of the eventful day when the magistrate tampered with the labels, a somewhat moody and distempered ramble had carried Mr. Forsyth to the corner of John Street ; and about the same moment Miss Hazeltine was called to the door of No. 16 by a thundering double knock.

Mr. Gideon Forsyth was a happy enough young man ; he would have been happier if he had had more money and less uncle. One hundred and twenty pounds a year was all his store ; but his uncle, Mr. Edward Hugh Bloomfield, supplemented this with a handsome allowance and a great deal of advice, couched in language that would probably have been judged intemperate on board a pirate ship. Mr. Bloomfield was indeed a figure quite peculiar to the days of Mr. Gladstone ; what we may call (for the lack of an accepted expression) a Squirradical. Having acquired years without experience, he carried into the Radical side of politics those noisy, after-dinner-table passions, which we are more accustomed to connect with Toryism in its severe and senile aspects. To the opinions of Mr. Bradlaugh, in fact, he added the temper and the

sympathies of that extinct animal, the Squire ; he admired pugilism, he carried a formidable oaken staff, he was a reverent churchman, and it was hard to know which would have more volcanically stirred his choler—a person who should have defended the established church, or one who should have neglected to attend its celebrations. He had besides some levelling catchwords, justly dreaded in the family circle ; and when he could not go so far as to declare a step un-English, he might still (and with hardly less effect) denounce it as unpractical. It was under the ban of this lesser excommunication that Gideon had fallen. His views on the study of law had been pronounced unpractical ; and it had been intimated to him, in a vociferous interview punctuated with the oaken staff, that he must either take a new start and get a brief or two, or prepare to live on his own money.

No wonder if Gideon was moody. He had not the slightest wish to modify his present habits ; but he would not stand on that, since the recall of Mr. Bloomfield's allowance would revolutionise them still more radically. He had not the least desire to acquaint himself with law ; he had looked into it already, and it seemed not to repay attention ; but upon this also he was ready to give way. In fact, he would go as far as he could to meet the views of his uncle, the Squirradical. But there was one part of the programme that appeared independent of his will. How to get a brief ? there was the question. And there was another and a worse. Suppose he got one, should he prove the better man ?

Suddenly he found his way barred by a crowd. A garishly illuminated van was backed against the kerb ; from its open stern, half resting on the street, half supported by some glistening athletes, the end of the largest packing-case in the county of Middlesex might have been seen protruding ; while, on the steps of the house, the burly person of the driver and the slim figure of a young girl stood as upon a stage, disputing.

" It is not for us," the girl was saying. " I beg you to take it away; it couldn't get into the house, even if you managed to get it out of the van."

" I shall leave it on the pavement, then, and M. Finsbury can arrange with the Vestry as he likes," said the vanman.

" But I am not M. Finsbury," expostulated the girl.

" It doesn't matter who you are," said the vanman.

" You must allow me to help you, Miss Hazeltine," said Gideon, putting out his hand.

Julia gave a little cry of pleasure. " O, Mr. Forsyth," she cried, " I am so glad to see you; we must get this horrid thing, which can only have come here by mistake, into the house. The man says we'll have to take off the door, or knock two of our windows into one, or be fined by the Vestry or Custom House or something for leaving our parcels on the pavement."

The men by this time had successfully removed the box from the van, had plumped it down on the pavement, and now stood leaning against it, or gazing at the door of No. 16, in visible physical distress and mental embarrassment. The windows of the whole street had filled, as if by magic, with interested and entertained spectators.

With as thoughtful and scientific an expression as he could assume, Gideon measured the doorway with his cane, while Julia entered his observations in a drawing-book. He then measured the box, and, upon comparing his data, found that there was just enough space for it to enter. Next, throwing off his coat and waistcoat, he assisted the men to take the door from its hinges. And lastly, all bystanders being pressed into the service, the packing-case mounted the steps upon some fifteen pairs of wavering legs—scraped, loudly grinding, through the doorway—and was deposited at length, with a formidable convulsion, in the far end of the lobby, which it almost blocked. The artisans of this victory smiled upon each

other as the dust subsided. It was true they had smashed a bust of Apollo and ploughed the wall into deep ruts ; but, at least, they were no longer one of the public spectacles of London.

" Well, sir," said the vanman, " I never see such a job."

Gideon eloquently expressed his concurrence in this sentiment by pressing a couple of sovereigns in the man's hand.

" Make it three, sir, and I'll stand Sam to everybody here ! " cried the latter, and, this having been done, the whole body of volunteer porters swarmed into the van, which drove off in the direction of the nearest reliable public-house. Gideon closed the door on their departure, and turned to Julia ; their eyes met ; the most uncontrollable mirth seized upon them both, and they made the house ring with their laughter. Then curiosity awoke in Julia's mind, and she went and examined the box, and more especially the label.

" This is the strangest thing that ever happened," she said, with another burst of laughter. " It is certainly Morris's handwriting, and I had a letter from him only this morning, telling me to expect a barrel. Is there a barrel coming too, do you think, Mr. Forsyth ? "

" ' Statuary with Care, Fragile,' " read Gideon aloud from the painted warning on the box. " Then you were told nothing about this ? "

" No," responded Julia. " O, Mr. Forsyth, don't you think we might take a peep at it ? "

" Yes, indeed," cried Gideon. " Just let me have a hammer."

" Come down, and I'll show you where it is," cried Julia. " The shelf is too high for me to reach " ; and, opening the door of the kitchen stair, she bade Gideon follow her. They found both the hammer and a chisel ; but Gideon was surprised to see no sign of a servant. He also discovered that Miss Hazeltine had a very pretty

little foot and ankle; and the discovery embarrassed him so much that he was glad to fall at once upon the packing-case.

He worked hard and earnestly, and dealt his blows with the precision of a blacksmith; Julia the while standing silently by his side, and regarding rather the workman than the work. He was a handsome fellow; she told herself she had never seen such beautiful arms. And suddenly, as though he had overheard these thoughts, Gideon turned and smiled to her. She, too, smiled and coloured; and the double change became her so prettily that Gideon forgot to turn away his eyes, and, swinging the hammer with a will, discharged a smashing blow on his own knuckles. With admirable presence of mind he crushed down an oath and substituted the harmless comment, "Butter fingers!" But the pain was sharp, his nerve was shaken, and after an abortive trial he found he must desist from further operations.

In a moment Julia was off to the pantry; in a moment she was back again with a basin of water and a sponge, and had begun to bathe his wounded hand.

"I am dreadfully sorry!" said Gideon apologetically. "If I had had any manners I should have opened the box first and smashed my hand afterward. It feels much better," he added. "I assure you it does."

"And now I think you are well enough to direct operations," said she. "Tell me what to do, and I'll be your workman."

"A very pretty workman," said Gideon, rather forgetting himself. She turned and looked at him, with a suspicion of a frown; and the indiscreet young man was glad to direct her attention to the packing-case. The bulk of the work had been accomplished; and presently Julia had burst through the last barrier and disclosed a zone of straw. In a moment they were kneeling side by side, engaged like hay-makers; the next they were rewarded with a glimpse of something white and polished;

and the next again laid bare an unmistakable marble leg.

"He is surely a very athletic person," said Julia.

"I never saw anything like it," responded Gideon. "His muscles stand out like penny rolls."

Another leg was soon disclosed, and then what seemed to be a third. This resolved itself, however, into a knotted club resting upon a pedestal.

"It is a Hercules," cried Gideon; "I might have guessed that from his calf. I'm supposed to be rather partial to statuary, but when it comes to Hercules, the police should interfere. I should say," he added, glancing with disaffection at the swollen leg, "that this was about the biggest and the worst in Europe. What in heaven's name can have induced him to come here?"

"I suppose nobody else would have a gift of him," said Julia. "And for that matter, I think we could have done without the monster very well."

"O, don't say that," returned Gideon. "This has been one of the most amusing experiences of my life."

"I don't think you'll forget it very soon," said Julia. "Your hand will remind you."

"Well, I suppose I must be going," said Gideon reluctantly.

"No," pleaded Julia. "Why should you? Stay and have tea with me."

"If I thought you really wished me to stay," said Gideon, looking at his hat, "of course I should only be too delighted."

"What a silly person you must take me for!" returned the girl. "Why, of course I do; and, besides, I want some cakes for tea, and I've nobody to send. Here is the latch-key."

Gideon put on his hat with alacrity, and casting one look at Miss Hazeltine, and another at the legs of Hercules, threw open the door and departed on his errand.

He returned with a large bag of the choicest and most

tempting of cakes and tartlets, and found Julia in the act of spreading a small tea-table in the lobby.

"The rooms are all in such a state," she cried, "that I thought we should be more cosy and comfortable in our own lobby, and under our own vine and statuary."

"Ever so much better," cried Gideon delightedly.

"O what adorable cream tarts!" said Julia, opening the bag, "and the dearest little cherry tartlets, with all the cherries spilled out into the cream!"

"Yes," said Gideon, concealing his dismay, "I knew they would mix beautifully; the woman behind the counter told me so."

"Now," said Julia, as they began their little festival, "I am going to show you Morris's letter; read it aloud, please; perhaps there's something I have missed."

Gideon took the letter, and spreading it out on his knee, read as follows:—

"DEAR JULIA,—I write you from Browndean, where we are stopping over for a few days. Uncle was much shaken in that dreadful accident, of which, I dare say, you have seen the account. To-morrow I leave him here with John, and come up alone; but before that, you will have received a barrel *containing specimens for a friend.* Do not open it on any account, but leave it in the lobby till I come.

"Yours in haste,
"M. FINSBURY.

"*P.S.*—Be sure and leave the barrel in the lobby."

"No," said Gideon, "there seems to be nothing about the monument," and he nodded, as he spoke, at the marble legs. "Miss Hazeltine," he continued, "would you mind me asking a few questions?"

"Certainly not," replied Julia; "and if you can make me understand why Morris has sent a statue of Hercules instead of a barrel containing specimens for a friend, I shall be grateful till my dying day. And what are specimens for a friend?"

"I haven't a guess," said Gideon. "Specimens are usually bits of stone, but rather smaller than our friend

the monument. Still, that is not the point. Are you quite alone in this big house ? "

" Yes, I am at present," returned Julia. " I came up before them to prepare the house, and get another servant. But I couldn't get one I liked."

" Then you are utterly alone," said Gideon in amazement. " Are you not afraid ? "

" No," responded Julia stoutly. " I don't see why I should be more afraid than you would be ; I am weaker, of course, but when I found I must sleep alone in the house I bought a revolver wonderfully cheap, and made the man show me how to use it."

" And how do you use it ? " demanded Gideon, much amused at her courage.

" Why," said she, with a smile, " you pull the little trigger thing on top, and then pointing it very low, for it springs up as you fire, you pull the underneath little trigger thing, and it goes off as well as if a man had done it."

" And how often have you used it ? " asked Gideon.

" O, I have not used it yet," said the determined young lady; " but I know how, and that makes me wonderfully courageous, especially when I barricade my door with a chest of drawers."

" I'm awfully glad they are coming back soon," said Gideon. " This business strikes me as excessively unsafe ; if it goes on much longer, I could provide you with a maiden aunt of mine, or my landlady if you preferred."

" Lend me an aunt ! " cried Julia. " O, what generosity ! I begin to think it must have been you that sent the Hercules."

" Believe me," cried the young man, " I admire you too much to send you such an infamous work of art."

Julia was beginning to reply, when they were both startled by a knocking at the door.

" O, Mr. Forsyth ! "

" Don't be afraid, my dear girl," said Gideon, laying his hand tenderly on her arm.

"I know it's the police," she whispered. "They are coming to complain about the statue."

The knock was repeated. It was louder than before, and more impatient.

"It's Morris," cried Julia, in a startled voice, and she ran to the door and opened it.

It was indeed Morris that stood before them; not the Morris of ordinary days, but a wild-looking fellow, pale and haggard, with bloodshot eyes, and a two-days' beard upon his chin.

"The barrel!" he cried. "Where's the barrel that came this morning?" And he stared about the lobby, his eyes, as they fell upon the legs of Hercules, literally goggling in his head. "What is that?" he screamed. "What is that waxwork? Speak, you fool! What is that? And where's the barrel—the water-butt?"

"No barrel came, Morris," responded Julia coldly. "This is the only thing that has arrived."

"This!" shrieked the miserable man. "I never heard of it!"

"It came addressed in your hand," replied Julia; "we had nearly to pull the house down to get it in, that is all that I can tell you."

Morris gazed at her in utter bewilderment. He passed his hand over his forehead; he leaned against the wall like a man about to faint. Then his tongue was loosed, and he overwhelmed the girl with torrents of abuse. Such fire, such directness, such a choice of ungentlemanly language, none had ever before suspected Morris to possess; and the girl trembled and shrank before his fury.

"You shall not speak to Miss Hazeltine in that way," said Gideon sternly. "It is what I will not suffer."

"I shall speak to the girl as I like," returned Morris, with a fresh outburst of anger. "I'll speak to the hussy as she deserves."

"Not a word more, sir, not one word," cried Gideon. "Miss Hazeltine," he continued, addressing the young

girl, "you cannot stay a moment longer in the same house with this unmanly fellow. Here is my arm; let me take you where you will be secure from insult."

"Mr. Forsyth," returned Julia, "you are right; I cannot stay here longer, and I am sure I trust myself to an honourable gentleman."

Pale and resolute, Gideon offered her his arm, and the pair descended the steps, followed by Morris clamouring for the latch-key.

Julia had scarcely handed the key to Morris before an empty hansom drove smartly into John Street. It was hailed by both men, and as the cabman drew up his restive horse, Morris made a dash into the vehicle.

"Sixpence above fare," he cried recklessly. "Waterloo Station for your life. Sixpence for yourself!"

"Make it a shilling, guv'ner," said the man, with a grin; "the other parties were first."

"A shilling then," cried Morris, with the inward reflection that he would reconsider it at Waterloo. The man whipped up his horse, and the hansom vanished from John Street.

CHAPTER VI

THE TRIBULATIONS OF MORRIS: PART THE FIRST

As the hansom span through the streets of London, Morris sought to rally the forces of his mind. The water-butt with the dead body had miscarried, and it was essential to recover it. So much was clear; and if, by some blest good fortune, it was still at the station, all might be well. If it had been sent out, however, if it were already in the hands of some wrong person, matters looked more ominous. People who receive unexplained packages are usually keen to have them open; the example of Miss Hazeltine (whom he cursed again) was there to remind him of the circumstance; and if anyone had opened the water-butt— "O Lord!" cried Morris at the thought, and carried his hand to his damp forehead. The private conception of any breach of law is apt to be inspiriting, for the scheme (while yet inchoate) wears dashing and attractive colours. Not so in the least that part of the criminal's later reflections which deal with the police. That useful corps (as Morris now began to think) had scarce been kept sufficiently in view when he embarked upon his enterprise. "I must play devilish close," he reflected, and he was aware of an exquisite thrill of fear in the region of the spine.

"Main line or loop?" inquired the cabman, through the scuttle.

"Main line," replied Morris, and mentally decided that the man should have his shilling after all. "It would be madness to attract attention," thought he. "But

what this thing will cost me, first and last, begins to be a nightmare ! "

He passed through the booking-office and wandered disconsolately on the platform. It was a breathing-space in the day's traffic. There were few people there, and these for the most part quiescent on the benches. Morris seemed to attract no remark, which was a good thing ; but, on the other hand, he was making no progress in his quest. Something must be done, something must be risked. Every passing instant only added to his dangers. Summoning all his courage, he stopped a porter, and asked him if he remembered receiving a barrel by the morning train. He was anxious to get information, for the barrel belonged to a friend. " It is a matter of some moment," he added, " for it contains specimens."

" I was not here this morning, sir," responded the porter, somewhat reluctantly, " but I'll ask Bill. Do you recollect, Bill, to have got a barrel from Bournemouth this morning containing specimens ? "

" I don't know about specimens," replied Bill ; " but the party as received the barrel I mean raised a sight of trouble."

" What's that ? " cried Morris, in the agitation of the moment pressing a penny into the man's hand.

" You see, sir, the barrel arrived at one-thirty. No one claimed it till about three, when a small, sickly-looking gentleman (probably a curate) came up, and sez he, ' Have you got anything for Pitman ? ' or ' Will'm Bent Pitman,' if I recollect right. ' I don't exactly know,' sez I, ' but I rather fancy that there barrel bears that name.' The little man went up to the barrel, and seemed regularly all took aback when he saw the address, and then he pitched into us for not having brought what he wanted. ' I don't care a damn what you want,' sez I to him, ' but if you are Will'm Bent Pitman, there's your barrel.' "

" Well, and did he take it ? " cried the breathless Morris.

" Well, sir," returned Bill, " it appears it was a packing-case he was after. The packing-case came; that's sure enough, because it was about the biggest packing-case ever I clapped eyes on. And this Pitman he seemed a good deal cut up, and he had the superintendent out, and they got hold of the vanman—him as took the packing-case. Well, sir," continued Bill, with a smile, " I never see a man in such a state. Everybody about that van was mortal, bar the horses. Some gen'leman (as well as I could make out) had given the vanman a sov.; and so that was where the trouble come in, you see."

" But what did he say ? " gasped Morris.

" I don't know as he *said* much, sir," said Bill. " But he offered to fight this Pitman for a pot of beer. He had lost his book, too, and the receipts, and his men were all as mortal as himself. O, they were all like "—and Bill paused for a simile—" like lords ! The superintendent sacked them on the spot."

" O, come, but that's not so bad," said Morris, with a bursting sigh. " He couldn't tell where he took the packing-case, then ? "

" Not he," said Bill, " nor yet nothink else."

" And what—what did Pitman do ? " asked Morris.

" O, he went off with the barrel in a four-wheeler, very trembling like," replied Bill. " I don't believe he's a gentleman as has good health."

" Well, so the barrel's gone," said Morris, half to himself.

" You may depend on that, sir," returned the porter. " But you had better see the superintendent."

" Not in the least; it's of no account," said Morris. " It only contained specimens." And he walked hastily away.

Ensconced once more in a hansom, he proceeded to reconsider his position. Suppose (he thought), suppose he should accept defeat and declare his uncle's death at once ? He should lose the tontine, and with that the last

hope of his seven thousand eight hundred pounds. But on the other hand, since the shilling to the hansom cabman, he had begun to see that crime was expensive in its course, and, since the loss of the water-butt, that it was uncertain in its consequences. Quietly at first, and then with growing heat, he reviewed the advantages of backing out. It involved a loss; but (come to think of it) no such great loss after all; only that of the tontine, which had been always a toss-up, which at bottom he had never really expected. He reminded himself of that eagerly; he congratulated himself upon his constant moderation. He had never really expected the tontine; he had never even very definitely hoped to recover his seven thousand eight hundred pounds; he had been hurried into the whole thing by Michael's obvious dishonesty. Yes, it would probably be better to draw back from this high-flying venture, settle back on the leather business——

"Great God!" cried Morris, bounding in the hansom like a Jack-in-a-box. "I have not only not gained the tontine—I have lost the leather business!"

Such was the monstrous fact. He had no power to sign; he could not draw a cheque for thirty shillings. Until he could produce legal evidence of his uncle's death, he was a penniless outcast—and as soon as he produced it he had lost the tontine! There was no hesitation on the part of Morris; to drop the tontine like a hot chestnut, to concentrate all his forces on the leather business and the rest of his small but legitimate inheritance, was the decision of a single instant. And the next, the full extent of his calamity was suddenly disclosed to him. Declare his uncle's death? He couldn't! Since the body was lost Joseph had (in a legal sense) become immortal.

There was no created vehicle big enough to contain Morris and his woes. He paid the hansom off and walked on he knew not whither.

"I seem to have gone into this business with too much

precipitation," he reflected, with a deadly sigh. "I fear it seems too ramified for a person of my powers of mind."

And then a remark of his uncle's flashed into his memory: If you want to think clearly, put it all down on paper. "Well, the old boy knew a thing or two," said Morris. "I will try; but I don't believe the paper was ever made that will clear my mind."

He entered a place of public entertainment, ordered bread and cheese, and writing materials, and sat down before them heavily. He tried the pen. It was an excellent pen, but what was he to write? "I have it," cried Morris. "Robinson Crusoe and the double columns!" He prepared his paper after that classic model, and began as follows:—

Bad.	*Good.*
1. I have lost my uncle's body.	1. But then Pitman has found it.

"Stop a bit," said Morris. "I am letting the spirit of antithesis run away with me. Let's start again."

Bad.	*Good.*
1. I have lost my uncle's body.	1. But then I no longer require to bury it.
2. I have lost the tontine.	2. But I may still save that if Pitman disposes of the body, and if I can find a physician who will stick at nothing.
3. I have lost the leather business and the rest of my uncle's succession.	3. But not if Pitman gives the body up to the police.

"O, but in that case I go to gaol; I had forgot that," thought Morris. "Indeed, I don't know that I had better dwell on that hypothesis at all; it's all very well to talk of facing the worst; but in a case of this kind a man's first duty is to his own nerve. Is there any answer to No. 3? Is there any possible good side to such a beastly bungle? There must be, of course, or where would be the use of this double-entry business? And—by George, I have

it!" he exclaimed; "it's exactly the same as the last!" And he hastily re-wrote the passage:

Bad.	*Good.*
3. I have lost the leather business and the rest of my uncle's succession.	3. But not if I can find a physician who will stick at nothing.

"This venal doctor seems quite a desideratum," he reflected. "I want him first to give me a certificate that my uncle is dead, so that I may get the leather business; and then that he's alive—but here we are again at the incompatible interests!" And he returned to his tabulation:

Bad.	*Good.*
4. I have almost no money.	4. But there is plenty in the bank.
5. Yes, but I can't get the money in the bank.	5. But—well, that seems unhappily to be the case.
6. I have left the bill for eight hundred pounds in Uncle Joseph's pocket.	6. But if Pitman is only a dishonest man, the presence of this bill may lead him to keep the whole thing dark and throw the body into the New Cut.
7. Yes, but if Pitman is dishonest and finds the bill, he will know who Joseph is, and he may blackmail me.	7. Yes, but if I am right about Uncle Masterman, I can blackmail Michael.
8. But I can't blackmail Michael (which is, besides, a very dangerous thing to do) until I find out.	8. Worse luck!
9. The leather business will soon want money for current expenses, and I have none to give.	9. But the leather business is a sinking ship.
10. Yes, but it's all the ship I have.	10. A fact.
11. John will soon want money, and I have none to give.	11.
12. And the venal doctor will want money down.	12.
13. And if Pitman is dishonest and don't send me to gaol, he will want a fortune.	13.

"O, this seems to be a very one-sided business," exclaimed Morris. "There's not so much in this method as I was led to think." He crumpled the paper up and threw it down; and then, the next moment, picked it up again and ran it over. "It seems it's on the financial point that my position is weakest," he reflected. "Is there positively no way of raising the wind? In a vast city like this, and surrounded by all the resources of civilisation, it seems not to be conceived! Let us have no more precipitation. Is there nothing I can sell? My collection of signet——" But at the thought of scattering these loved treasures the blood leaped into Morris's cheek. "I would rather die!" he exclaimed, and, cramming his hat upon his head, strode forth into the streets.

"I *must* raise funds," he thought. "My uncle being dead, the money in the bank is mine, or would be mine but for the cursed injustice that has pursued me ever since I was an orphan in a commercial academy. I know what any other man would do; any other man in Christendom would forge; although I don't know why I call it forging, either, when Joseph's dead, and the funds are my own. When I think of that, when I think that my uncle is really as dead as mutton, and that I can't prove it, my gorge rises at the injustice of the whole affair. I used to feel bitterly about that seven thousand eight hundred pounds; it seems a trifle now! Dear me, why, the day before yesterday I was comparatively happy."

And Morris stood on the sidewalk and heaved another sobbing sigh.

"Then there's another thing," he resumed; "can I? Am I able? Why didn't I practise different handwritings while I was young? How a fellow regrets those lost opportunities when he grows up! But there's one comfort: it's not morally wrong; I can try it on with a clear conscience, and even if I was found out, I wouldn't greatly care—morally, I mean. And then, if I succeed, and if Pitman is staunch—there's nothing to do but find a venal

doctor; and that ought to be simple enough in a place like London. By all accounts the town's alive with them. It wouldn't do, of course, to advertise for a corrupt physician; that would be impolitic. No, I suppose a fellow has simply to spot along the streets for a red lamp and herbs in the window, and then you go in and—and—and put it to him plainly; though it seems a delicate step."

He was near home now, after many devious wanderings, and turned up John Street. As he thrust his latch-key in the lock, another mortifying reflection struck him to the heart.

"Not even this house is mine till I can prove him dead," he snarled, and slammed the door behind him so that the windows in the attic rattled.

Night had long fallen; long ago the lamps and the shop-fronts had begun to glitter down the endless streets; the lobby was pitch-dark; and, as the devil would have it, Morris barked his shins and sprawled all his length over the pedestal of Hercules. The pain was sharp; his temper was already thoroughly undermined; by a last misfortune his hand closed on the hammer as he fell; and, in a spasm of childish irritation, he turned and struck at the offending statue. There was a splintering crash.

"O Lord, what have I done next?" wailed Morris; and he groped his way to find a candle. "Yes," he reflected, as he stood with the light in his hand and looked upon the mutilated leg, from which about a pound of muscle was detached. "Yes, I have destroyed a genuine antique; I may be in for thousands!" And then there sprung up in his bosom a sort of angry hope. "Let me see," he thought. "Julia's got rid of; there's nothing to connect me with that beast Forsyth; the men were all drunk, and (what's better) they've been all discharged. O, come, I think this is another case of moral courage! I'll deny all knowledge of the thing."

A moment more, and he stood again before the Hercules, his lips sternly compressed, the coal-axe and the meat-

cleaver under his arm. The next, he had fallen upon the packing-case. This had been already seriously undermined by the operations of Gideon; a few well-directed blows, and it already quaked and gaped; yet a few more, and it fell about Morris in a shower of boards followed by an avalanche of straw.

And now the leather-merchant could behold the nature of his task: and at the first sight his spirit quailed. It was, indeed, no more ambitious a task for De Lesseps, with all his men and horses, to attack the hills of Panama, than for a single, slim young gentleman, with no previous experience of labour in a quarry, to measure himself against that bloated monster on his pedestal. And yet the pair were well encountered: on the one side, bulk—on the other, genuine heroic fire.

"Down you shall come, you great big ugly brute!" cried Morris aloud, with something of that passion which swept the Parisian mob against the walls of the Bastille. "Down you shall come, this night. I'll have none of you in my lobby."

The face, from its indecent expression, had particularly animated the zeal of our iconoclast; and it was against the face that he began his operations. The great height of the demigod—for he stood a fathom and half in his stocking-feet—offered a preliminary obstacle to this attack. But here, in the first skirmish of the battle, intellect already began to triumph over matter. By means of a pair of library steps, the injured householder gained a posture of advantage; and, with great swipes of the coal-axe, proceeded to decapitate the brute.

Two hours later, what had been the erect image of a gigantic coal-porter turned miraculously white, was now no more than a medley of disjected members; the quadragenarian torso prone against the pedestal; the lascivious countenance leering down the kitchen stair; the legs, the arms, the hands, and even the fingers, scattered broadcast on the lobby floor. Half an hour more, and all the

débris had been laboriously carted to the kitchen; and Morris, with a gentle sentiment of triumph, looked round upon the scene of his achievements. Yes, he could deny all knowledge of it now: the lobby, beyond the fact that it was partly ruinous, betrayed no trace of the passage of Hercules. But it was a weary Morris that crept up to bed; his arms and shoulders ached, the palms of his hands burned from the rough kisses of the coal-axe, and there was one smarting finger that stole continually to his mouth. Sleep long delayed to visit the dilapidated hero, and with the first peep of day it had again deserted him.

The morning, as though to accord with his disastrous fortunes, dawned inclemently. An easterly gale was shouting in the streets; flaws of rain angrily assailed the windows; and as Morris dressed, the draught from the fireplace vividly played about his legs.

"I think," he could not help observing bitterly, "that with all I have to bear, they might have given me decent weather."

There was no bread in the house, for Miss Hazeltine (like all women left to themselves) had subsisted entirely upon cake. But some of this was found, and (along with what the poets call a glass of fair, cold water) made up a semblance of a morning meal, and then down he sat undauntedly to his delicate task.

Nothing can be more interesting than the study of signatures, written (as they are) before meals and after, during indigestion and intoxication; written when the signer is trembling for the life of his child or has come from winning the Derby, in his lawyer's office, or under the bright eyes of his sweetheart. To the vulgar, these seem never the same; but to the expert, the bank clerk, or the lithographer, they are constant quantities, and as recognisable as the North Star to the night-watch on deck.

To all this Morris was alive. In the theory of that graceful art in which he was now embarking, our spirited leather-merchant was beyond all reproach. But, happily

for the investor, forgery is an affair of practice. And as Morris sat surrounded by examples of his uncle's signature and of his own incompetence, insidious depression stole upon his spirits. From time to time the wind wuthered in the chimney at his back; from time to time there swept over Bloomsbury a squall so dark that he must rise and light the gas; about him was the chill and the mean disorder of a house out of commission—the floor bare, the sofa heaped with books and accounts enveloped in a dirty table-cloth, the pens rusted, the paper glazed with a thick film of dust; and yet these were but adminicles of misery, and the true root of his depression lay round him on the table in the shape of misbegotten forgeries.

"It's one of the strangest things I ever heard of," he complained. "It almost seems as if it was a talent that I didn't possess." He went once more minutely through his proofs. "A clerk would simply gibe at them," said he. "Well, there's nothing else but tracing possible."

He waited till a squall had passed and there came a blink of scowling daylight. Then he went to the window, and in the face of all John Street traced his uncle's signature. It was a poor thing at the best. "But it must do," said he, as he stood gazing woefully on his handiwork. "He's dead, anyway." And he filled up the cheque for a couple of hundred and sallied forth for the Anglo-Patagonian Bank.

There, at the desk at which he was accustomed to transact business, and with as much indifference as he could assume, Morris presented the forged cheque to the big, red-bearded Scots teller. The teller seemed to view it with surprise; and as he turned it this way and that, and even scrutinised the signature with a magnifying-glass, his surprise appeared to warm into disfavour. Begging to be excused for a moment, he passed away into the rear-most quarters of the bank; whence, after an appreciable interval, he returned again in earnest talk with a superior, an oldish and a baldish, but a very gentlemanly man.

"Mr. Morris Finsbury, I believe," said the gentlemanly man, fixing Morris with a pair of double eye-glasses.

"That is my name," said Morris, quavering. "Is there anything wrong?"

"Well, the fact is, Mr. Finsbury, you see we are rather surprised at receiving this," said the other, flicking at the cheque. "There are no effects."

"No effects?" cried Morris. "Why, I know myself there must be eight-and-twenty hundred pounds, if there's a penny."

"Two seven six four, I think," replied the gentlemanly man; "but it was drawn yesterday."

"Drawn!" cried Morris.

"By your uncle himself, sir," continued the other. "Not only that, but we discounted a bill for him for—let me see—how much was it for, Mr. Bell?"

"Eight hundred, Mr. Judkin," replied the teller.

"Dent Pitman!" cried Morris, staggering back.

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Judkin.

"It's—it's only an expletive," said Morris.

"I hope there's nothing wrong, Mr. Finsbury," said Mr. Bell.

"All I can tell you," said Morris, with a harsh laugh, "is that the whole thing's impossible. My uncle is at Bournemouth, unable to move."

"Really!" cried Mr. Bell, and he recovered the cheque from Mr. Judkin. "But this cheque is dated in London, and to-day," he observed. "How d'ye account for that, sir?"

"O, that was a mistake," said Morris, and a deep tide of colour dyed his face and neck.

"No doubt, no doubt," said Mr. Judkin, but he looked at his customer inquiringly.

"And—and—" resumed Morris, "even if there were no effects—this is a very trifling sum to overdraw—our firm—the name of Finsbury, is surely good enough for such a wretched sum as this."

"No doubt, Mr. Finsbury," returned Mr. Judkin; "and if you insist I will take it into consideration; but I hardly think—in short, Mr. Finsbury, if there had been nothing else, the signature seems hardly all that we could wish."

"That's of no consequence," replied Morris nervously. "I'll get my uncle to sign another. The fact is," he went on, with a bold stroke, "my uncle is so far from well at present that he was unable to sign this cheque without assistance, and I fear that my holding the pen for him may have made the difference in the signature."

Mr. Judkin shot a keen glance into Morris's face; and then turned and looked at Mr. Bell.

"Well," he said, "it seems as if we had been victimised by a swindler. Pray tell Mr. Finsbury we shall put detectives on at once. As for this cheque of yours, I regret that, owing to the way it was signed, the bank can hardly consider it—what shall I say?—business-like," and he returned the cheque across the counter.

Morris took it up mechanically; he was thinking of something very different.

"In a case of this kind," he began, "I believe the loss falls on us; I mean upon my uncle and myself."

"It does not, sir," replied Mr. Bell; "the bank is responsible, and the bank will either recover the money or refund it, you may depend on that."

Morris's face fell; then it was visited by another gleam of hope.

"I'll tell you what," he said, "you leave this entirely in my hands. I'll sift the matter. I've an idea, at any rate; and detectives," he added appealingly, "are so expensive."

"The bank would not hear of it," returned Mr. Judkin. "The bank stands to lose between three and four thousand pounds; it will spend as much more if necessary. An undiscovered forger is a permanent danger. We shall clear it up to the bottom, Mr. Finsbury; set your mind at rest on that."

"Then I'll stand the loss," said Morris boldly. "I order you to abandon the search." He was determined that no inquiry should be made.

"I beg your pardon," returned Mr. Judkin, "but we have nothing to do with you in this matter, which is one between your uncle and ourselves. If he should take this opinion, and will either come here himself or let me see him in his sick-room——"

"Quite impossible," cried Morris.

"Well, then, you see," said Mr. Judkin, "how my hands are tied. The whole affair must go at once into the hands of the police."

Morris mechanically folded the cheque and restored it to his pocket-book.

"Good-morning," said he, and scrambled somehow out of the bank.

"I don't know what they suspect," he reflected; "I can't make them out, their whole behaviour is thoroughly unbusiness-like. But it doesn't matter; all's up with everything. The money has been paid; the police are on the scent; in two hours that idiot Pitman will be nabbed—and the whole story of the dead body in the evening papers."

If he could have heard what passed in the bank after his departure he would have been less alarmed, perhaps more mortified.

"That was a curious affair, Mr. Bell," said Mr. Judkin.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Bell, "but I think we have given him a fright."

"O, we shall hear no more of Mr. Morris Finsbury," returned the other; it was a first attempt, and the house have dealt with us so long that I was anxious to deal gently. But I suppose, Mr. Bell, there can be no mistake about yesterday? It was old Mr. Finsbury himself?"

"There could be no possible doubt of that," said Mr.

Bell with a chuckle. "He explained to me the principles of banking."

"Well, well," said Mr. Judkin. "The next time he calls ask him to step into my room. It is only proper he should be warned."

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH WILLIAM DENT PITMAN TAKES LEGAL ADVICE

Norfolk Street, King's Road—jocularly known among Mr. Pitman's lodgers as "Norfolk Island"—is neither a long, a handsome, nor a pleasing thoroughfare. Dirty, undersized maids-of-all-work issue from it in pursuit of beer, or linger on its sidewalk listening to the voice of love. The cat's-meat man passes twice a day. An occasional organ-grinder wanders in and wanders out again, disgusted. In holiday-time the street is the arena of the young bloods of the neighbourhood, and the householders have an opportunity of studying the manly art of self-defence. And yet Norfolk Street has one claim to be respectable, for it contains not a single shop—unless you count the public-house at the corner, which is really in the King's Road.

The door of No. 7 bore a brass plate inscribed with the legend "W. D. Pitman, Artist." It was not a particularly clean brass plate, nor was No. 7 itself a particularly inviting place of residence. And yet it had a character of its own, such as may well quicken the pulse of the reader's curiosity. For here was the home of an artist—and a distinguished artist too, highly distinguished by his ill-success—which had never been made the subject of an article in the illustrated magazines. No wood-engraver had ever reproduced "a corner in the back drawing-room" or "the studio mantelpiece" of No. 7; no young lady author had ever commented on "the unaffected simplicity" with which Mr. Pitman received

her in the midst of his " treasures." It is an omission I would gladly supply, but our business is only with the backward parts and " abject rear " of this æsthetic dwelling.

Here was a garden, boasting a dwarf fountain (that never played) in the centre, a few grimy-looking flowers in pots, two or three newly-planted trees which the spring of Chelsea visited without noticeable consequence, and two or three statues after the antique, representing satyrs and nymphs in the worst possible style of sculptured art. On one side the garden was overshadowed by a pair of crazy studios, usually hired out to the more obscure and youthful practitioners of British art. Opposite these another lofty out-building, somewhat more carefully finished, and boasting of a communication with the house and a private door on the back lane, enshrined the multifarious industry of Mr. Pitman. All day, it is true, he was engaged in the work of education at a seminary for young ladies ; but the evenings at least were his own, and these he would prolong far into the night, now dashing off " A landscape with waterfall " in oil, now a volunteer bust (" in marble," as he would gently but proudly observe) of some public character, now stooping his chisel to a mere " nymph " (" for a gas-bracket on a stair, sir "), or a life-size " Infant Samuel " for a religious nursery. Mr. Pitman had studied in Paris, and he had studied in Rome, supplied with funds by a fond parent who went subsequently bankrupt in consequence of a fall in corsets ; and though he was never thought to have the smallest modicum of talent, it was at one time supposed that he had learned his business. Eighteen years of what is called " tuition " had relieved him of the dangerous knowledge. His artist lodgers would sometimes reason with him ; they would point out to him how impossible it was to paint by gas-light, or to sculpture life-sized nymphs without a model.

" I know that," he would reply. " No one in Norfolk Street knows it better ; and if I were rich I should certainly employ the best models in London ; but, being

poor, I have taught myself to do without them. An occasional model would only disturb my ideal conception of the figure, and be a positive impediment in my career. As for painting by an artificial light," he would continue, "that is simply a knack I have found it necessary to acquire, my days being engrossed in the work of tuition."

At the moment when we must present him to our readers, Pitman was in his studio alone, by the dying light of the October day. He sat (sure enough with "unaffected simplicity") in a Windsor chair, his low-crowned black felt hat by his side; a dark, weak, harmless, pathetic little man, clad in the hue of mourning, his coat longer than is usual with the laity, his neck enclosed in a collar without a parting, his neckcloth pale in hue and simply tied; the whole outward man, except for a pointed beard, tentatively clerical. There was a thinning on the top of Pitman's head, there were silver hairs at Pitman's temple. Poor gentleman, he was no longer young; and years, and poverty, and humble ambition thwarted, make a cheerless lot.

In front of him, in the corner by the door, there stood a portly barrel; and let him turn them where he might, it was always to the barrel that his eyes and his thoughts returned.

"Should I open it? Should I return it? Should I communicate with Mr. Semitopolis at once?" he wondered. "No," he concluded finally, "nothing without Mr. Finsbury's advice." And he arose and produced a shabby leathern desk. It opened without the formality of unlocking, and displayed the thick cream-coloured note-paper on which Mr. Pitman was in the habit of communicating with the proprietors of schools and the parents of his pupils. He placed the desk on the table by the window, and taking a saucer of Indian ink from the chimney-piece, laboriously composed the following letter:

"My dear Mr. Finsbury," it ran, "would it be presuming

on your kindness if I asked you to pay me a visit here this evening? It is in no trifling matter that I invoke your valuable assistance, for need I say more than it concerns the welfare of Mr. Semitopolis's statue of Hercules? I write you in great agitation of mind; for I have made all inquiries, and greatly fear that this work of ancient art has been mislaid. I labour besides under another perplexity, not unconnected with the first. Pray excuse the inelegance of this scrawl, and believe me yours in haste, William D. Pitman."

Armed with this he set forth and rang the bell of No. 233 King's Road, the private residence of Michael Finsbury. He had met the lawyer at a time of great public excitement in Chelsea; Michael, who had a sense of humour and a great deal of careless kindness in his nature, followed the acquaintance up, and, having come to laugh, remained to drop into a contemptuous kind of friendship. By this time, which was four years after the first meeting, Pitman was the lawyer's dog.

"No," said the elderly housekeeper, who opened the door in person, "Mr. Michael's not in yet. But ye're looking terribly poorly, Mr. Pitman. Take a glass of sherry, sir, to cheer ye up."

"No, I thank you, ma'am," replied the artist. "It is very good in you, but I scarcely feel in sufficient spirits for sherry. Just give Mr. Finsbury this note, and ask him to look round—to the door in the lane, you will please tell him; I shall be in the studio all evening."

And he turned again into the street and walked slowly homeward. A hair-dresser's window caught his attention, and he stared long and earnestly at the proud, high-born, waxen lady in evening dress, who circulated in the centre of the show. The artist woke in him, in spite of his troubles.

"It is all very well to run down the men who make these things," he cried, "but there's a something—there's a haughty, indefinable something about that figure. It's

what I tried for in my 'Empress Eugénie,'" he added, with a sigh.

And he went home reflecting on the quality. "They don't teach you that direct appeal in Paris," he thought. "It's British. Come, I am going to sleep, I must wake up, I must aim higher—aim higher," cried the little artist to himself. All through his tea and afterward, as he was giving his eldest boy a lesson on the fiddle, his mind dwelt no longer on his troubles, but he was rapt into the better land; and no sooner was he at liberty than he hastened with positive exhilaration to his studio.

Not even the sight of the barrel could entirely cast him down. He flung himself with rising zest into his work—a bust of Mr. Gladstone from a photograph; turned (with extraordinary success) the difficulty of the back of the head, for which he had no documents beyond a hazy recollection of a public meeting; delighted himself by his treatment of the collar; and was only recalled to the cares of life by Michael Finsbury's rattle at the door.

"Well, what's wrong?" said Michael, advancing to the grate, where, knowing his friend's delight in a bright fire, Mr. Pitman had not spared the fuel. "I suppose you have come to grief somehow."

"There is no expression strong enough," said the artist. "Mr. Semitopolis's statue has not turned up, and I am afraid I shall be answerable for the money; but I think nothing of that—what I fear, my dear Mr. Finsbury, what I fear—alas that I should have to say it!—is exposure. The Hercules was to be smuggled out of Italy; a thing positively wrong, a thing of which a man of my principles and in my responsible position should have taken (as I now see too late) no part whatever."

"This sounds like very serious work," said the lawyer. "It will require a great deal of drink, Pitman."

"I took the liberty of—in short, of being prepared for you," replied the artist, pointing to a kettle, a bottle of gin, a lemon, and glasses.

Michael mixed himself a grog, and offered the artist a cigar.

"No, thank you," said Pitman. "I used occasionally to be rather partial to it, but the smell is so disagreeable about the clothes."

"All right," said the lawyer. "I am comfortable now. Unfold your tale."

At some length Pitman set forth his sorrows. He had gone to-day to Waterloo, expecting to receive the colossal Hercules, and he had received instead a barrel not big enough to hold Discobolus; yet the barrel was addressed in the hand (with which he was perfectly acquainted) of his Roman correspondent. What was stranger still, a case had arrived by the same train, large enough and heavy enough to contain the Hercules; and this case had been taken to an address now undiscoverable. "The vanman (I regret to say it) had been drinking, and his language was such as I could never bring myself to repeat. He was at once discharged by the superintendent of the line, who behaved most properly throughout, and is to make inquiries at Southampton. In the meanwhile, what was I to do? I left my address and brought the barrel home; but, remembering an old adage, I determined not to open it except in the presence of my lawyer."

"Is that all?" asked Michael. "I don't see any cause to worry. The Hercules has stuck upon the road. It will drop in to-morrow or the day after; and as for the barrel, depend upon it, it's a testimonial from one of your young ladies, and probably contains oysters."

"O, don't speak so loud!" cried the little artist. "It would cost me my place if I were heard to speak lightly of the young ladies; and besides, why oysters from Italy? and why should they come to me addressed in Signor Ricardi's hand?"

"Well, let's have a look at it," said Michael. "Let's roll it forward to the light."

The two men rolled the barrel from the corner, and stood it on end before the fire.

"It's heavy enough to be oysters," remarked Michael judiciously.

"Shall we open it at once?" inquired the artist, who had grown decidedly cheerful under the combined effects of company and gin; and without waiting for a reply, he began to strip as if for a prize-fight, tossed his clerical collar in the waste-paper basket, hung his clerical coat upon a nail, and with a chisel in one hand and a hammer in the other, struck the first blow of the evening.

"That's the style, William Dent!" cried Michael. "There's fire for your money! It may be a romantic visit from one of the young ladies—a sort of Cleopatra business. Have a care and don't stave in Cleopatra's head."

But the sight of Pitman's alacrity was infectious. The lawyer could sit still no longer. Tossing his cigar into the fire, he snatched the instrument from the unwilling hands of the artist, and fell to himself. Soon the sweat stood in beads upon his large, fair brow; his stylish trousers were defaced with iron rust, and the state of his chisel testified to misdirected energies.

A cask is not an easy thing to open, even when you set about it in the right way; when you set about it wrongly, the whole structure must be resolved into its elements. Such was the course pursued alike by the artist and the lawyer. Presently the last hoop had been removed —a couple of smart blows tumbled the staves upon the ground—and what had once been a barrel was no more than a confused heap of broken and distorted boards.

In the midst of these, a certain dismal something, swathed in blankets, remained for an instant upright, and then toppled to one side and heavily collapsed before the fire. Even as the thing subsided, an eye-glass tingled to the floor and rolled toward the screaming Pitman.

"Hold your tongue!" said Michael. He dashed to

the house door and locked it; then, with a pale face and bitten lip, he drew near, pulled aside a corner of the swathing blanket, and recoiled, shuddering.

There was a long silence in the studio.

"Now tell me," said Michael, in a low voice: "Had you any hand in it?" and he pointed to the body.

The little artist could only utter broken and disjointed sounds.

Michael poured some gin into a glass. "Drink that," he said. "Don't be afraid of me. I'm your friend through thick and thin."

Pitman put the liquor down untasted.

"I swear before God," he said, "this is another mystery to me. In my worst fears I never dreamed of such a thing. I would not lay a finger on a sucking infant."

"That's all square," said Michael, with a sigh of huge relief. "I believe you, old boy." And he shook the artist warmly by the hand. "I thought for a moment," he added with rather a ghastly smile, "I thought for a moment you might have made away with Mr. Semitopolis."

"It would make no difference if I had," groaned Pitman. "All is at an end for me. There's the writing on the wall."

"To begin with," said Michael, "let's get him out of sight; for to be quite plain with you, Pitman, I don't like your friend's appearance." And with that the lawyer shuddered. "Where can we put it?"

"You might put it in the closet there—if you could bear to touch it," answered the artist.

"Somebody has to do it, Pitman," returned the lawyer; "and it seems as if it had to be me. You go over to the table, turn your back, and mix me a grog; that's a fair division of labour."

About ninety seconds later the closet-door was heard to shut.

"There," observed Michael, "that's more home-like. You can turn now, my pallid Pitman. Is this

the grog?" he ran on. "Heaven forgive you, it's a lemonade."

"But, O, Finsbury, what are we to do with it?" wailed the artist, laying a clutching hand upon the lawyer's arm.

"Do with it?" repeated Michael. "Bury it in one of your flower-beds, and erect one of your own statues for a monument. I tell you we should look devilish romantic shovelling out the sod by the moon's pale ray. Here, put some gin in this."

"I beg of you, Mr. Finsbury, do not trifle with my misery," cried Pitman. "You see before you a man who has been all his life—I do not hesitate to say it—eminently respectable. Even in this solemn hour I can lay my hand upon my heart without a blush. Except on the really trifling point of the smuggling of the Hercules (and even of that I now humbly repent), my life has been entirely fit for publication. I never feared the light," cried the little man; "and now—now——!"

"Cheer up, old boy," said Michael. "I assure you we should count this little contretemps a trifle at the office; it's the sort of thing that may occur to any one; and if you're perfectly sure you had no hand in it——"

"What language am I to find——" began Pitman.

"O, I'll do that part of it," interrupted Michael, "you have no experience. But the point is this: If—or rather since—you know nothing of the crime, since the—the party in the closet—is neither your father, nor your brother, nor your creditor, nor your mother-in-law, nor what they call an injured husband——"

"O, my dear sir!" interjected Pitman, horrified.

"Since, in short," continued the lawyer, "you had no possible interest in the crime, we have a perfectly free field before us and a safe game to play. Indeed the problem is really entertaining; it is one I have long contemplated in the light of an A. B. case; here it is at last under my hand in specie; and I mean to pull you through. Do

you hear that?—I mean to pull you through. Let me see: it's a long time since I have had what I call a genuine holiday; I'll send an excuse to-morrow to the office. We had best be lively," he added significantly; "for we must not spoil the market for the other man."

"What do you mean?" inquired Pitman. "What other man? The inspector of police?"

"Damn the inspector of police!" remarked his companion. "If you won't take the short cut and bury this in your back garden, we must find some one who will bury it in his. We must place the affair, in short, in the hands of some one with fewer scruples and more resources."

"A private detective, perhaps?" suggested Pitman.

"There are times when you fill me with pity," observed the lawyer. "By the way, Pitman," he added in another key, "I have always regretted that you have no piano in this den of yours. Even if you don't play yourself, your friends might like to entertain themselves with a little music while you were mudding."

"I shall get one at once if you like," said Pitman nervously, anxious to please. "I play the fiddle a little as it is."

"I know you do," said Michael; "but what's the fiddle—above all as you play it? What you want is polyphonic music. And I'll tell you what it is—since it's too late for you to buy a piano I'll give you mine."

"Thank you," said the artist blankly. "You will give me yours? I am sure it's very good in you."

"Yes, I'll give you mine," continued Michael, "for the inspector of police to play on while his men are digging up your back garden."

Pitman stared at him in pained amazement.

"No, I'm not insane," Michael went on. "I'm playful, but quite coherent. See here, Pitman: follow me one half minute. I mean to profit by the refreshing fact that we are really and truly innocent; nothing but the presence of the—you know what—connects us with the

crime ; once let us get rid of it, no matter how, and there is no possible clue to trace us by. Well, I give you my piano ; we'll bring it round this very night. To-morrow we rip the fittings out, deposit the—our friend—inside, plump the whole on a cart, and carry it to the chambers of a young gentleman whom I know by sight."

" Whom do you know by sight ? " repeated Pitman.

" And what is more to the purpose," continued Michael, " whose chambers I know better than he does himself. A friend of mine—I call him my friend for brevity ; he is now, I understand, in Demerara and (most likely) in gaol—was the previous occupant. I defended him, and I got him off too—all saved but honour ; his assets were nil, but he gave me what he had, poor gentleman, and along with the rest—the key of his chambers. It's there that I propose to leave the piano and, shall we say, Cleopatra ? "

" It seems very wild," said Pitman. " And what will become of the poor young gentleman whom you know by sight ? "

" It will do him good," said Michael cheerily. " Just what he wants to steady him."

" But, my dear sir, he might be involved in a charge of—a charge of murder," gulped the artist.

" Well, he'll be just where we are," returned the lawyer. " He's innocent, you see. What hangs people, my dear Pitman, is the unfortunate circumstance of guilt."

" But indeed, indeed," pleaded Pitman, " the whole scheme appears to me so wild. Would it not be safer, after all, just to send for the police ? "

" And make a scandal ? " inquired Michael. " ' The Chelsea Mystery ; alleged innocence of Pitman ' ? How would that do at the Seminary ? "

" It would imply my discharge," admitted the drawing-master. " I cannot deny that."

" And besides," said Michael, " I am not going to embark in such a business and have no fun for my money."

"O my dear sir, is that a proper spirit?" cried Pitman.

"O, I only said that to cheer you up," said the unabashed Michael. "Nothing like a little judicious levity. But it's quite needless to discuss. If you mean to follow my advice, come on, and let us get the piano at once. If you don't, just drop me the word, and I'll leave you to deal with the whole thing according to your better judgment."

"You know perfectly well that I depend on you entirely," returned Pitman. "But O, what a night is before me with that—horror in my studio! How am I to think of it on my pillow?"

"Well, you know, my piano will be there too," said Michael. "That'll raise the average."

An hour later a cart came up the lane, and the lawyer's piano—a momentous Broadwood grand—was deposited in Mr. Pitman's studio.

CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH MICHAEL FINSBURY ENJOYS A HOLIDAY

Punctually at eight o'clock next morning the lawyer rattled (according to previous appointment) on the studio door. He found the artist sadly altered for the worse —bleached, bloodshot, and chalky—a man upon wires, the tail of his haggard eye still wandering to the closet. Nor was the professor of drawing less inclined to wonder at his friend. Michael was usually attired in the height of fashion, with a certain mercantile brilliancy best described perhaps as stylish; nor could anything be said against him, as a rule, but that he looked a trifle too like a wedding guest to be quite a gentleman. To-day he had fallen altogether from these heights. He wore a flannel shirt of washed-out shepherd's tartan, and a suit of reddish tweeds, of the colour known to tailors as "heather mixture"; his neckcloth was black, and tied loosely in a sailor's knot; a rusty ulster partly concealed these advantages; and his feet were shod with rough walking boots. His hat was an old soft felt, which he removed with a flourish as he entered.

"Here I am, William Dent!" he cried, and drawing from his pocket two little wisps of reddish hair, he held them to his cheeks like side-whiskers and danced about the studio with the filmy graces of a ballet-girl.

Pitman laughed sadly. "I should never have known you," said he.

"Nor were you intended to," returned Michael, replacing his false whiskers in his pocket. "Now we must overhaul you and your wardrobe, and disguise you up to the nines."

"Disguise!" cried the artist. "Must I indeed disguise myself? Has it come to that?"

"My dear creature," returned his companion, "disguise is the spice of life. What is life, passionately exclaimed a French philosopher, without the pleasures of disguise? I don't say it's always good taste, and I know it's unprofessional; but what's the odds, downhearted drawing-master? It has to be. We have to leave a false impression on the minds of many persons, and in particular on the mind of Mr. Gideon Forsyth—the young gentleman I know by sight—if he should have the bad taste to be at home."

"If he be at home?" faltered the artist. "That would be the end of all."

"Won't matter a d——," returned Michael airily. "Let me see your clothes, and I'll make a new man of you in a jiffy."

In the bedroom, to which he was at once conducted, Michael examined Pitman's poor and scanty wardrobe with a humorous eye, picked out a short jacket of black alpaca, and presently added to that a pair of summer trousers which somehow took his fancy as incongruous. Then, with the garments in his hand, he scrutinised the artist closely.

"I don't like that clerical collar," he remarked. "Have you nothing else?"

The professor of drawing pondered for a moment, and then brightened; "I have a pair of low-necked shirts," he said, "that I used to wear in Paris as a student. They are rather loud."

"The very thing!" ejaculated Michael. "You'll look perfectly beastly. Here are spats, too," he continued, drawing forth a pair of those offensive little gaiters. "Must have spats! And now you jump into these, and whistle a tune at the window for (say) three-quarters of an hour. After that you can rejoin me on the field of glory."

So saying, Michael returned to the studio. It was

the morning of the easterly gale; the wind blew shrilly among the statues in the garden, and drove the rain upon the skylight in the studio ceiling; and at about the same moment of the time when Morris attacked the hundredth version of his uncle's signature in Bloomsbury, Michael, in Chelsea, began to rip the wires out of the Broadwood grand.

Three-quarters of an hour later Pitman was admitted, to find the closet-door standing open, the closet untenanted, and the piano discreetly shut.

"It's a remarkably heavy instrument," observed Michael, and turned to consider his friend's disguise. "You must shave off that beard of yours," he said.

"My beard!" cried Pitman. "I cannot shave my beard. I cannot tamper with my appearance—my principals would object. They hold very strong views as to the appearance of the professors—young ladies are considered so romantic. My beard was regarded as quite a feature when I went about the place. It was regarded," said the artist, with rising colour, "it was regarded as unbecoming."

"You can let it grow again," returned Michael, "and then you'll be so precious ugly that they'll raise your salary."

"But I don't want to be ugly," cried the artist.

"Don't be an ass," said Michael, who hated beards and was delighted to destroy one. "Off with it like a man!"

"Of course, if you insist," said Pitman; and then he sighed, fetched some hot water from the kitchen, and setting a glass upon his easel, first clipped his beard with scissors and then shaved his chin. He could not conceal from himself, as he regarded the result, that his last claims to manhood had been sacrificed, but Michael seemed delighted.

"A new man, I declare!" he cried. "When I give you the window-glass spectacles I have in my pocket,

you'll be the beau-idéal of a French commercial traveller."

Pitman did not reply, but continued to gaze disconsolately on his image in the glass.

"Do you know," asked Michael, "what the Governor of South Carolina said to the Governor of North Carolina? 'It's a long time between drinks,' observed that powerful thinker; and if you will put your hand into the top left-hand pocket of my ulster, I have an impression you will find a flask of brandy. Thank you, Pitman," he added, as he filled out a glass for each. "Now you will give me news of this."

The artist reached out his hand for the water-jug, but Michael arrested the movement.

"Not if you went upon your knees!" he cried. "This is the finest liqueur brandy in Great Britain."

Pitman put his lips to it, set it down again, and sighed.

"Well, I must say you're the poorest companion for a holiday!" cried Michael. "If that's all you know of brandy, you shall have no more of it; and while I finish the flask, you may as well begin business. Come to think of it," he broke off, "I have made an abominable error: you should have ordered the cart before you were disguised. Why, Pitman, what the devil's the use of you? why couldn't you have reminded me of that?"

"I never even knew there was a cart to be ordered," said the artist. "But I can take off the disguise again," he suggested eagerly.

"You would find it rather a bother to put on your beard," observed the lawyer. "No, it's a false step; the sort of thing that hangs people," he continued, with eminent cheerfulness, as he sipped his brandy; "and it can't be retraced now. Off to the mews with you, make all the arrangements; they're to take the piano from here, cart it to Victoria, and despatch it thence by rail to Cannon Street, to lie till called for in the name of Fortuné du Boisgobey."

"Isn't that rather an awkward name?" pleaded Pitman.

"Awkward?" cried Michael scornfully. "It would hang us both! Brown is both safer and easier to pronounce. Call it Brown."

"I wish," said Pitman, "for my sake, I wish you wouldn't talk so much of hanging."

"Talking about it's nothing, my boy!" returned Michael. "But take your hat and be off, and mind and pay everything beforehand."

Left to himself, the lawyer turned his attention for some time exclusively to the liqueur brandy, and his spirits, which had been pretty fair all morning, now prodigiously rose. He proceeded to adjust his whiskers finally before the glass. "Devilish rich," he remarked, as he contemplated his reflection. "I look like a purser's mate." And at that moment the window-glass spectacles (which he had hitherto destined for Pitman) flashed into his mind; he put them on, and fell in love with the effect. "Just what I required," he said. "I wonder what I look like now? A humorous novelist, I should think," and he began to practise divers characters of walk, naming them to himself as he proceeded. "Walk of a humorous novelist—but that would require an umbrella. Walk of a purser's mate. Walk of an Australian colonist revisiting the scenes of childhood. Walk of Sepoy colonel, ditto, ditto." And in the midst of the Sepoy colonel (which was an excellent assumption, although inconsistent with the style of his make-up), his eye lighted on the piano. This instrument was made to lock both at the top and at the keyboard, but the key of the latter had been mislaid. Michael opened it and ran his fingers over the dumb keys. "Fine instrument—full, rich tone," he observed, and he drew in a seat.

When Mr. Pitman returned to the studio, he was appalled to observe his guide, philosopher, and friend performing miracles of execution on the silent grand.

"Heaven help me!" thought the little man, "I fear he has been drinking! Mr. Finsbury," he said aloud; and Michael, without rising, turned upon him a countenance somewhat flushed, encircled with the bush of the red whiskers, and bestridden by the spectacles. "Capriccio in B-flat on the departure of a friend," said he, continuing his noiseless evolutions.

Indignation awoke in the mind of Pitman. "Those spectacles were to be mine," he cried. "They are an essential part of my disguise."

"I am going to wear them myself," replied Michael; and he added, with some show of truth, "There would be a devil of a lot of suspicion aroused if we both wore spectacles."

"O, well," said the assenting Pitman, "I rather counted on them; but of course, if you insist. And at any rate, here is the cart at the door."

While the men were at work, Michael concealed himself in the closet among the débris of the barrel and the wires of the piano; and as soon as the coast was clear the pair sallied forth by the lane, jumped into a hansom in the King's Road, and were driven rapidly toward town. It was still cold and raw and boisterous; the rain beat strongly in their faces, but Michael refused to have the glass let down; he had now suddenly donned the character of cicerone, and pointed out and lucidly commented on the sights of London, as they drove. "My dear fellow," he said, "you don't seem to know anything of your native city. Suppose we visited the Tower? No? Well, perhaps it's a trifle out of our way. But, anyway—Here, cabby, drive round by Trafalgar Square!" And on that historic battle-field he insisted on drawing up, while he criticised the statues and gave the artist many curious details (quite new to history) of the lives of the celebrated men they represented.

It would be difficult to express what Pitman suffered in the cab: cold, wet, terror in the capital degree, a

grounded distrust of the commander under whom he served, a sense of imprudency in the matter of the low-necked shirt, a bitter sense of the decline and fall involved in the deprivation of his beard, all these were among the ingredients of the bowl. To reach the restaurant, for which they were deviously steering, was the first relief. To hear Michael bespeak a private room was a second and a still greater. Nor, as they mounted the stair under the guidance of an unintelligible alien, did he fail to note with gratitude the fewness of the persons present, or the still more cheering fact that the greater part of these were exiles from the land of France. It was thus a blessed thought that none of them would be connected with the Seminary; for even the French professor, though admittedly a Papist, he could scarce imagine frequenting so rakish an establishment.

The alien introduced them into a small bare room with a single table, a sofa, and a dwarfish fire; and Michael called promptly for more coals and a couple of brandies and sodas.

"O, no," said Pitman, "surely not — no more to drink."

"I don't know what you would be at," said Michael plaintively. "It's positively necessary to do something; and one shouldn't smoke before meals—I thought that was understood. You seem to have no idea of hygiene." And he compared his watch with the clock upon the chimney-piece.

Pitman fell into bitter musing; here he was, ridiculously shorn, absurdly disguised, in the company of a drunken man in spectacles, and waiting for a champagne luncheon in a restaurant painfully foreign. What would his principals think, if they could see him? What if they knew his tragic and deceitful errand?

From these reflections he was aroused by the entrance of the alien with the brandies and sodas. Michael took one and bade the waiter pass the other to his friend.

Pitman waved it from him with his hand. "Don't let me lose all self-respect," he said.

"Anything to oblige a friend," returned Michael. "But I'm not going to drink alone. Here," he added to the waiter, "you take it." And, then, touching glasses, "The health of Mr. Gideon Forsyth," said he.

"Meestare Gidden Borsye," replied the waiter, and he tossed off the liquor in four gulps.

"Have another?" said Michael, with undisguised interest. "I never saw a man drink faster. It restores one's confidence in the human race."

But the waiter excused himself politely, and, assisted by some one from without, began to bring in lunch.

Michael made an excellent meal, which he washed down with a bottle of Heidsieck's dry monopole. As for the artist, he was far too uneasy to eat, and his companion flatly refused to let him share in the champagne unless he did.

"One of us must stay sober," remarked the lawyer, "and I won't give you champagne on the strength of a leg of grouse. I have to be cautious," he added confidentially. "One drunken man, excellent business—two drunken men, all my eye."

On the production of coffee and departure of the waiter, Michael might have been observed to make portentous efforts after gravity of mien. He looked his friend in the face (one eye perhaps a trifle off), and addressed him thickly but severely.

"Enough of this fooling," was his not inappropriate exordium. "To business. Mark me closely. I am an Australian. My name is John Dickson, though you mightn't think it from my unassuming appearance. You will be relieved to hear that I am rich, sir, very rich. You can't go into this sort of thing too thoroughly, Pitman; the whole secret is preparation, and I can get up my biography from the beginning, and I could tell it you now, only I have forgotten it."

"Perhaps I'm stupid——" began Pitman.

"That's it!" cried Michael. "Very stupid; but rich too—richer than I am. I thought you would enjoy it, Pitman, so I've arranged that you were to be literally wallowing in wealth. But then, on the other hand, you're only an American, and a maker of india-rubber overshoes at that. And the worst of it is—why should I conceal it from you?—the worst of it is that you're called Ezra Thomas. Now," said Michael, with a really appalling seriousness of manner, "tell me who we are."

The unfortunate little man was cross-examined till he knew these facts by heart.

"There!" cried the lawyer. "Our plans are laid. Thoroughly consistent—that's the great thing."

"But I don't understand," objected Pitman.

"O, you'll understand right enough when it comes to the point," said Michael, rising.

"There doesn't seem any story to it," said the artist.

"We can invent one as we go along," returned the lawyer.

"But I can't invent," protested Pitman. "I never could invent in all my life."

"You'll find you'll have to, my boy," was Michael's easy comment, and he began calling for the waiter, with whom he at once resumed a sparkling conversation.

It was a downcast little man that followed him. "Of course he is very clever, but can I trust him in such a state?" he asked himself. And when they were once more in a hansom, he took heart of grace.

"Don't you think," he faltered, "it would be wiser, considering all things, to put this business off?"

"Put off till to-morrow what can be done to-day?" cried Michael, with indignation. "Never heard of such a thing! Cheer up, it's all right, go in and win—there's a lion-hearted Pitman!"

At Cannon Street they inquired for Mr. Brown's piano, which had duly arrived, drove thence to a neighbouring

mews, where they contracted for a cart, and while that was being got ready, took shelter in the harness-room beside the stove. Here the lawyer presently toppled against the wall and fell into a gentle slumber; so that Pitman found himself launched on his own resources in the midst of several staring loafers, such as love to spend unprofitable days about a stable.

"Rough day, sir," observed one. "Do you go far?"

"Yes, it's a—rather a rough day," said the artist; and then, feeling that he must change the conversation, "My friend is an Australian; he is very impulsive," he added.

"An Australian?" said another. "I've a brother myself in Melbourne. Does your friend come from that way at all?"

"No, not exactly," replied the artist, whose ideas of the geography of New Holland were a little scattered. "He lives immensely far inland, and is very rich."

The loafers gazed with great respect upon the slumbering colonist.

"Well," remarked the second speaker, "it's a mighty big place, is Australia. Do you come from thereaway too?"

"No, I do not," said Pitman. "I do not, and I don't want to," he added irritably. And then, feeling some diversion needful, he fell upon Michael and shook him up.

"Hullo," said the lawyer, "what's wrong?"

"The cart is nearly ready," said Pitman sternly. "I will not allow you to sleep."

"All right—no offence, old man," replied Michael, yawning. "A little sleep never did anybody any harm; I feel comparatively sober now. But what's all the hurry?" he added, looking round him glassily. "I don't see the cart, and I've forgotten where we left the piano."

What more the lawyer might have said, in the confidence of the moment, is with Pitman a matter of tremu-

lous conjecture to this day; but by the most blessed circumstance the cart was then announced, and Michael must bend the forces of his mind to the more difficult task of rising.

"Of course you'll drive," he remarked to his companion, as he clambered on the vehicle.

"I drive!" cried Pitman. "I never did such a thing in my life. I cannot drive."

"Very well," responded Michael with entire composure, "neither can I see. But just as you like. Anything to oblige a friend."

A glimpse of the ostler's darkening countenance decided Pitman. "All right," he said desperately, "you drive. I'll tell you where to go."

On Michael in the character of charioteer (since this is not intended to be a novel of adventure) it would be superfluous to dwell at length. Pitman, as he sat holding on and gasping counsels, sole witness of this singular feat, knew not whether most to admire the driver's valour or his undeserved good fortune. But the latter at least prevailed, the cart reached Cannon Street without disaster; and Mr. Brown's piano was speedily and cleverly got on board.

"Well, sir," said the leading porter, smiling as he mentally reckoned up a handful of loose silver, "that's a mortal heavy piano."

"It's the richness of the tone," returned Michael, as he drove away.

It was but a little distance in the rain, which now fell thick and quiet, to the neighbourhood of Mr. Gideon Forsyth's chambers in the Temple. There, in a deserted by-street, Michael drew up the horses and gave them in charge to a blighted shoe-black; and the pair descending from the cart, whereon they had figured so incongruously, set forth on foot for the decisive scene of their adventure. For the first time Michael displayed a shadow of uneasiness.

"Are my whiskers right?" he asked. "It would be the devil and all if I was spotted."

"They are perfectly in their place," returned Pitman, with scant attention. "But is my disguise equally effective? There is nothing more likely than that I should meet some of my patrons."

"O, nobody could tell you without your beard," said Michael. "All you have to do is to remember to speak slow; you speak through your nose already."

"I only hope the young man won't be at home," sighed Pitman.

"And I only hope he'll be alone," returned the lawyer. "It will save a precious sight of manœuvring."

And sure enough, when they had knocked at the door, Gideon admitted them in person to a room, warmed by a moderate fire, framed nearly to the roof in works connected with the bench of British Themis, and offering, except in one particular, eloquent testimony to the legal zeal of the proprietor. The one particular was the chimney-piece, which displayed a varied assortment of pipes, tobacco, cigar-boxes, and yellow-backed French novels.

"Mr. Forsyth, I believe?" It was Michael who thus opened the engagement. "We have come to trouble you with a piece of business. I fear it's scarcely professional——"

"I am afraid I ought to be instructed through a solicitor," replied Gideon.

"Well, well, you shall name your own, and the whole affair can be put on a more regular footing to-morrow," replied Michael, taking a chair and motioning Pitman to do the same. "But you see we didn't know any solicitors; we did happen to know of you, and time presses."

"May I inquire, gentlemen," asked Gideon, "to whom it was I am indebted for a recommendation?"

"You may inquire," returned the lawyer, with a

foolish laugh; "but I was invited not to tell you—till the thing was done."

"My uncle, no doubt," was the barrister's conclusion.

"My name is John Dickson," continued Michael; "a pretty well-known name in Ballarat; and my friend here is Mr. Ezra Thomas, of the United States of America, a wealthy manufacturer of india-rubber overshoes."

"Stop one moment till I make a note of that," said Gideon; any one might have supposed he was an old practitioner.

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind my smoking a cigar?" asked Michael. He had pulled himself together for the entrance; now again there began to settle on his mind clouds of irresponsible humour and incipient slumber; and he hoped (as so many have hoped in the like case) that a cigar would clear him.

"Oh, certainly," cried Gideon blandly. "Try one of mine; I can confidently recommend them." And he handed the box to his client.

"In case I don't make myself perfectly clear," observed the Australian, "it's perhaps best to tell you candidly that I've been lunching. It's a thing that may happen to any one."

"O, certainly," replied the affable barrister. "But please be under no sense of hurry. I can give you," he added, thoughtfully consulting his watch—"yes, I can give you the whole afternoon."

"The business that brings me here," resumed the Australian with gusto, "is devilish delicate, I can tell you. My friend Mr. Thomas, being an American of Portuguese extraction, unacquainted with our habits, and a wealthy manufacturer of Broadwood pianos——"

"Broadwood pianos?" cried Gideon, with some surprise. "Dear me, do I understand Mr. Thomas to be a member of the firm?"

"O, pirated Broadwoods," returned Michael. "My friend's the American Broadwood."

"But I understood you to say," objected Gideon, "I certainly have it so in my notes—that your friend was a manufacturer of india-rubber overshoes."

"I know it's confusing at first," said the Australian, with a beaming smile. "But he—in short, he combines the two professions. And many others besides—many, many, many others," repeated Mr. Dickson, with drunken solemnity. "Mr. Thomas's cotton-mills are one of the sights of Tallahassee; Mr. Thomas's tobacco-mills are the pride of Richmond, Va.; in short, he's one of my oldest friends, Mr. Forsyth, and I lay his case before you with emotion."

The barrister looked at Mr. Thomas and was agreeably prepossessed by his open although nervous countenance, and the simplicity and timidity of his manner. "What a people are these Americans!" he thought. "Look at this nervous, weedy, simple little bird in a low-necked shirt, and think of him wielding and directing interests so extended and seemingly incongruous! But had we not better," he observed aloud, "had we not perhaps better approach the facts?"

"Man of business, I perceive, sir!" said the Australian. "Let's approach the facts. It's a breach of promise case."

The unhappy artist was so unprepared for this view of his position that he could scarce suppress a cry.

"Dear me," said Gideon, "they are apt to be very troublesome. Tell me everything about it," he added kindly; "if you require my assistance, conceal nothing."

"*You* tell him," said Michael, feeling, apparently, that he had done his share. "My friend will tell you all about it," he added to Gideon, with a yawn. "Excuse my closing my eyes a moment; I've been sitting up with a sick friend."

Pitman gazed blankly about the room; rage and despair seethed in his innocent spirit; thoughts of flight, thoughts even of suicide, came and went before him; and still the

barrister patiently waited, and still the artist groped in vain for any form of words, however insignificant.

"It's a breach of promise case," he said at last, in a low voice. "I—I am threatened with a breach of promise case." Here, in desperate quest of inspiration, he made a clutch at his beard; his fingers closed upon the unfamiliar smoothness of a shaven chin; and with that, hope and courage (if such expressions could ever have been appropriate in the case of Pitman) conjointly fled. He shook Michael roughly. "Wake up!" he cried, with genuine irritation in his tones. "I cannot do it, and you know I can't."

"You must excuse my friend," said Michael; "he's no hand as a narrator of stirring incident. The case is simple," he went on. "My friend is a man of very strong passions, and accustomed to a simple, patriarchal style of life. You see the thing from here: unfortunate visit to Europe, followed by unfortunate acquaintance with sham foreign count, who has a lovely daughter. Mr. Thomas was quite carried away; he proposed, he was accepted, and he wrote—wrote in a style which I am sure he must regret to-day. If these letters are produced in court, sir, Mr. Thomas's character is gone."

"Am I to understand——" began Gideon.

"My dear sir," said the Australian emphatically, "it isn't possible to understand unless you saw them."

"That is a painful circumstance," said Gideon; he glanced pityingly in the direction of the culprit, and, observing on his countenance every mark of confusion, pityingly withdrew his eyes.

"And that would be nothing," continued Mr. Dickson sternly, "but I wish—I wish from my heart, sir, I could say that Mr. Thomas's hands were clean. He has no excuse; for he was engaged at the time—and is still engaged—to the belle of Constantinople, Ga. My friend's conduct was unworthy of the brutes that perish."

"Ga.?" repeated Gideon inquiringly.

"A contraction in current use," said Michael. "Ga. for Georgia, in the same way as Co. for Company."

"I was aware it was sometimes so written," returned the barrister, "but not that it was so pronounced."

"Fact, I assure you," said Michael. "You now see for yourself, sir, that if this unhappy person is to be saved, some devilish sharp practice will be needed. There's money, and no desire to spare it. Mr. Thomas could write a cheque to-morrow for a hundred thousand. And, Mr. Forsyth, there's better than money. The foreign count—Count Tarnow, he calls himself—was formerly a tobacconist in Bayswater, and passed under the humble but expressive name of Schmidt; his daughter—if she is his daughter—there's another point—make a note of that, Mr. Forsyth—his daughter at that time actually served in the shop—and she now proposes to marry a man of the eminence of Mr. Thomas! Now do you see our game? We know they contemplate a move; and we wish to forestall 'em. Down you go to Hampton Court, where they live, and threaten, or bribe, or both, until you get the letters; if you can't, God help us, we must go to court and Thomas must be exposed. I'll be done with him for one," added the unchivalrous friend.

"There seem some elements of success," said Gideon. "Was Schmidt at all known to the police?"

"We hope so," said Michael. "We have every ground to think so. Mark the neighbourhood—Bayswater! Doesn't Bayswater occur to you as very suggestive?"

For perhaps the sixth time during this remarkable interview, Gideon wondered if he were not becoming light-headed. "I suppose it's just because he has been lunching," he thought; and then added aloud, "To what figure may I go?"

"Perhaps five thousand would be enough for to-day," said Michael. "And now, sir, do not let me detain you any longer; the afternoon wears on; there are plenty of

trains to Hampton Court; and I needn't try to describe to you the impatience of my friend. Here is a five-pound note for current expenses; and here is the address." And Michael began to write, paused, tore up the paper, and put the pieces in his pocket. "I will dictate," he said, "my writing is so uncertain."

Gideon took down the address, "Count Tarnow, Kurnaul Villa, Hampton Court." Then he wrote something else on a sheet of paper. "You said you had not chosen a solicitor," he said. "For a case of this sort, here is the best man in London." And he handed the paper to Michael.

"God bless me!" ejaculated Michael, as he read his own address.

"O, I daresay you have seen his name connected with some rather painful cases," said Gideon. "But he is himself a perfectly honest man, and his capacity is recognised. And now, gentlemen, it only remains for me to ask where I shall communicate with you."

"The Langham, of course," returned Michael. "Till to-night."

"Till to-night," replied Gideon, smiling. "I suppose I may knock you up at a late hour?"

"Any hour, any hour," cried the vanishing solicitor.

"Now there's a young fellow with a head upon his shoulders," he said to Pitman, as soon as they were in the street.

Pitman was indistinctly heard to murmur, "Perfect fool."

"Not a bit of him," returned Michael. "He knows who's the best solicitor in London, and it's not every man can say the same. But, I say, didn't I pitch it in hot?"

Pitman returned no answer.

"Hullo!" said the lawyer, pausing, "what's wrong with the long-suffering Pitman?"

"You had no right to speak of me as you did," the

artist broke out; "your language was perfectly unjustifiable; you have wounded me deeply."

"I never said a word about you," replied Michael. "I spoke of Ezra Thomas; and do please remember that there's no such party."

"It's just as hard to bear," said the artist.

But by this time they had reached the corner of the by-street; and there was the faithful shoeblack, standing by the horses' heads with a splendid assumption of dignity; and there was the piano, figuring forlorn upon the cart, while the rain beat upon its unprotected sides and trickled down its elegantly varnished legs.

The shoeblack was again put in requisition to bring five or six strong fellows from the neighbouring public-house; and the last battle of the campaign opened. It is probable that Mr. Gideon Forsyth had not yet taken his seat in the train for Hampton Court, before Michael opened the door of the chambers, and the grunting porters deposited the Broadwood grand in the middle of the floor.

"And now," said the lawyer, after he had sent the men about their business, "one more precaution. We must leave him the key of the piano, and we must contrive that he shall find it. Let me see." And he built a square tower of cigars upon the top of the instrument, and dropped the key into the middle.

"Poor young man," said the artist, as they descended the stairs.

"He is in a devil of a position," assented Michael drily. "It'll brace him up."

"And that reminds me," observed the excellent Pitman, "that I fear I displayed a most ungrateful temper. I had no right, I see, to resent expressions, wounding as they were, which were in no sense directed."

"That's all right," cried Michael, getting on the cart. "Not a word more, Pitman. Very proper feeling on your part; no man of self-respect can stand by and hear his *alias* insulted."

The rain had now ceased, Michael was fairly sober, the body had been disposed of, and the friends were reconciled. The return to the mews was therefore (in comparison with previous stages of the day's adventures) quite a holiday outing; and when they had returned the cart and walked forth again from the stable-yard, unchallenged, and even unsuspected, Pitman drew a deep breath of joy.

"And now," he said, "we can go home."

"Pitman," said the lawyer, stopping short, "your recklessness fills me with concern. What! we have been wet through the greater part of the day, and you propose, in cold blood, to go home! No, sir—hot Scotch."

And taking his friend's arm he led him sternly towards the nearest public-house. Nor was Pitman (I regret to say) wholly unwilling. Now that peace was restored and the body gone, a certain innocent skittishness began to appear in the manners of the artist; and when he touched his steaming glass to Michael's, he giggled aloud like a venturesome school-girl at a picnic.

CHAPTER IX

GLORIOUS CONCLUSION OF MICHAEL FINSBURY'S HOLIDAY

I KNOW Michael Finsbury personally; my business—I know the awkwardness of having such a man for a lawyer—still it's an old story now, and there is such a thing as gratitude, and, in short, my legal business, although now (I am thankful to say) of quite a placid character, remains entirely in Michael's hands. But the trouble is I have no natural talent for addresses; I learn one for every man—that is friendship's offering; and the friend who subsequently changes his residence is dead to me, memory refusing to pursue him. Thus it comes about that, as I always write to Michael at his office, I cannot swear to his number in the King's Road. Of course (like my neighbours), I have been to dinner there. Of late years, since his accession to wealth, neglect of business, and election to the club, these little festivals have become common. He picks up a few fellows in the smoking-room—all men of Attic wit—myself, for instance, if he has the luck to find me disengaged; a string of hansoms may be observed (by Her Majesty) bowling gaily through St. James's Park; and in a quarter of an hour the party surrounds one of the best appointed boards in London.

But at the time of which we write the house in the King's Road (let us still continue to call it No. 233) was kept very quiet; when Michael entertained guests it was at the halls of Nichol or Verrey that he would convene them, and the door of his private residence remained closed against his friends. The upper story, which was sunny,

was set apart for his father; the drawing-room was never opened; the dining-room was the scene of Michael's life. It is in this pleasant apartment, sheltered from the curiosity of King's Road by wire blinds, and entirely surrounded by the lawyer's unrivalled library of poetry and criminal trials, that we find him sitting down to his dinner after his holiday with Pitman. A spare old lady, with very bright eyes and a mouth humorously compressed, waited upon the lawyer's needs; in every line of her countenance she betrayed the fact that she was an old retainer; in every word that fell from her lips she flaunted the glorious circumstance of a Scottish origin; and the fear with which this powerful combination fills the boldest was obviously no stranger to the bosom of our friend. The hot Scotch having somewhat warmed up the embers of the Heidsieck, it was touching to observe the master's eagerness to pull himself together under the servant's eye; and when he remarked, "I think, Teena, I'll take a brandy and soda," he spoke like a man doubtful of his elocution, and not half certain of obedience.

"No such a thing, Mr. Michael," was the prompt return. "Clar't and water."

"Well, well, Teena, I daresay you know best," said the master. "Very fatiguing day at the office, though."

"What?" said the retainer, "ye never were near the office!"

"O yes, I was though; I was repeatedly along Fleet Street," returned Michael.

"Pretty pliskies ye've been at this day!" cried the old lady, with humorous alacrity; and then, "Take care —don't break my crystal!" she cried, as the lawyer came within an ace of knocking the glasses off the table.

"And how is he keeping?" asked Michael.

"O, just the same, Mr. Michael, just the way he'll be till the end, worthy man!" was the reply. "But ye'll not be the first that's asked me that the day."

"No?" said the lawyer. "Who else?"

"Ay, that's a joke, too," said Teena grimly. "A friend of yours: Mr. Morris."

"Morris! What was the little beggar wanting here?" inquired Michael.

"Wantin'? To see him," replied the housekeeper, completing her meaning by a movement of the thumb toward the upper story. "That's by his way of it; but I've an idee of my own. He tried to bribe me, Mr. Michael. Bribe—me!" she repeated, with inimitable scorn. "That's no' kind of a young gentleman."

"Did he so?" said Michael. "I bet he didn't offer much."

"No more he did," replied Teena; nor could any subsequent questioning elicit from her the sum with which the thrifty leather merchant had attempted to corrupt her. "But I sent him about his business," she said gallantly. "He'll not come here again in a hurry."

"He mustn't see my father, you know; mind that!" said Michael. "I'm not going to have any public exhibition to a little beast like him."

"No fear of me lettin' him," replied the trusty one. "But the joke is this, Mr. Michael—see, ye're upsettin' the sauce, that's a clean table-cloth—the best of the joke is that he thinks your father's dead and you're keepin' it dark."

Michael whistled. "Set a thief to catch a thief," said he.

"Exac'ly what I told him!" cried the delighted dame.

"I'll make him dance for that," said Michael.

"Couldn't ye get the law of him some way?" suggested Teena truculently.

"No, I don't think I could, and I'm quite sure I don't want to," replied Michael. "But I say, Teena, I really don't believe this claret's wholesome; it's not a sound, reliable wine. Give us a brandy and soda, there's a good soul." Teena's face became like adamant. "Well,

then," said the lawyer fretfully, " I won't eat any more dinner."

" Ye can please yourself about that, Mr. Michael," said Teena, and began composedly to take away.

" I do wish Teena wasn't a faithful servant ! " sighed the lawyer, as he issued into King's Road.

The rain had ceased ; the wind still blew, but only with a pleasant freshness ; the town, in the clear darkness of the night, glittered with street-lamps and shone with glancing rain-pools. " Come, this is better," thought the lawyer to himself, and he walked on eastward, lending a pleased ear to the wheels and the million footfalls of the city.

Near the end of the King's Road he remembered his brandy and soda, and entered a flaunting public-house. A good many persons were present, a waterman from a cab-stand, half a dozen of the chronically unemployed, a gentleman (in one corner) trying to sell æsthetic photographs out of a leather case to another and very youthful gentleman with a yellow goatee, and a pair of lovers debating some fine shade (in the other). But the centrepiece and great attraction was a little old man, in a black, ready-made surtout, which was obviously a recent purchase. On the marble table in front of him, beside a sandwich and a glass of beer, there lay a battered forage-cap. His hand fluttered abroad with oratorical gestures ; his voice, naturally shrill, was plainly tuned to the pitch of the lecture-room ; and by arts, comparable to those of the Ancient Mariner, he was now holding spell-bound the barmaid, the waterman, and four of the unemployed.

" I have examined all the theatres in London," he was saying ; " and pacing the principal entrances, I have ascertained them to be ridiculously disproportionate to the requirements of their audiences. The doors opened the wrong way—I forget at this moment which it is, but have a note of it at home ; they were frequently locked during the performance, and when the auditorium was

literally thronged with English people. You have probably not had my opportunities of comparing distant lands; but I can assure you this has been long ago recognised as a mark of aristocratic government. Do you suppose, in a country really self-governed, such abuses could exist? Your own intelligence, however uncultivated, tells you they could not. Take Austria, a country even possibly more enslaved than England. I have myself conversed with one of the survivors of the Ring Theatre, and though his colloquial German was not very good, I succeeded in gathering a pretty clear idea of his opinion of the case. But, what will perhaps interest you still more, here is a cutting on the subject from a Vienna newspaper, which I will now read to you, translating as I go. You can see for yourselves; it is printed in the German character." And he held the cutting out for verification, much as a conjurer passes a trick orange along the front bench.

"Hullo, old gentleman! Is this you?" said Michael, laying his hand upon the orator's shoulder.

The figure turned with a convulsion of alarm, and showed the countenance of Mr. Joseph Finsbury.

"You, Michael!" he cried. "There's no one with you, is there?"

"No," replied Michael, ordering a brandy and soda, "there's nobody with me; whom do you expect?"

"I thought of Morris or John," said the old gentleman, evidently greatly relieved.

"What the devil would I be doing with Morris or John?" cried the nephew.

"There is something in that," returned Joseph. "And I believe I can trust you. I believe you will stand by me."

"I hardly know what you mean," said the lawyer, "but if you are in need of money I am flush."

"It's not that, my dear boy," said the uncle, shaking him by the hand. "I'll tell you all about it afterwards."

"All right," responded the nephew. "I stand treat, Uncle Joseph; what will you have?"

" In that case," replied the old gentleman, " I'll take another sandwich. I daresay I surprise you," he went on, " with my presence in a public-house; but the fact is, I act on a sound but little-known principle of my own——"

" O, it's better known than you suppose," said Michael sipping his brandy and soda. " I always act on it myself when I want a drink."

The old gentleman, who was anxious to propitiate Michael, laughed a cheerless laugh. " You have such a flow of spirits," said he, " I am sure I often find it quite amusing. But regarding this principle of which I was about to speak. It is that of accommodating one's-self to the manners of any land (however humble) in which our lot may be cast. Now, in France, for instance, every one goes to a café for his meals; in America, to what is called a ' two-bit house ' ; in England the people resort to such an institution as the present for refreshment. With sandwiches, tea, and an occasional glass of bitter beer, a man can live luxuriously in London for fourteen pounds twelve shillings per annum."

" Yes, I know," returned Michael, " but that's not including clothes, washing, or boots. The whole thing, with cigars and occasional sprees, costs me over seven hundred a year."

But this was Michael's last interruption. He listened in good-humoured silence to the remainder of his uncle's lecture, which speedily branched to political reform, thence to the theory of the weather-glass, with an illustrative account of a bora in the Adriatic; thence again to the best manner of teaching arithmetic to the deaf-and-dumb; and with that, the sandwich being then no more, *explicuit valde feliciter.* A moment later the pair issued forth on the King's Road.

" Michael," said his uncle, " the reason that I am here is because I cannot endure those nephews of mine. I find them intolerable."

"I daresay you do," assented Michael, "I never could stand them for a moment."

"They wouldn't let me speak," continued the old gentleman bitterly; "I never was allowed to get a word in edgewise; I was shut up at once with some impertinent remark. They kept me on short allowance of pencils, when I wished to make notes of the most absorbing interest; the daily newspaper was guarded from me like a young baby from a gorilla. Now, you know me, Michael. I live for my calculations; I live for my manifold and ever-changing views of life; pens and paper and the productions of the popular press are to me as important as food and drink; and my life was growing quite intolerable when, in the confusion of that fortunate railway accident at Browndean, I made my escape. They must think me dead, and are trying to deceive the world for the chance of the tontine."

"By the way, how do you stand for money?" asked Michael kindly.

"Pecuniarily speaking, I am rich," returned the old man with cheerfulness. "I am living at present at the rate of one hundred a year, with unlimited pens and paper; the British Museum at which to get books; and all the newspapers I choose to read. But it's extraordinary how little a man of intellectual interest requires to bother with books in a progressive age. The newspapers supply all the conclusions."

"I'll tell you what," said Michael, "come and stay with me."

"Michael," said the old gentleman, "it's very kind of you, but you scarcely understand what a peculiar position I occupy. There are some little financial complications; as a guardian, my efforts were not altogether blessed; and not to put too fine a point upon the matter, I am absolutely in the power of that vile fellow, Morris."

"You should be disguised," cried Michael eagerly;

"I will lend you a pair of window-glass spectacles and some red side-whiskers."

"I had already canvassed that idea," replied the old gentleman, "but feared to awaken remark in my unpretentious lodgings. The aristocracy, I am well aware——"

"But see here," interrupted Michael, "how do you come to have any money at all? Don't make a stranger of me, Uncle Joseph; I know all about the trust, and the hash you made of it, and the assignment you were forced to make to Morris."

Joseph narrated his dealings with the bank.

"O, but I say, this won't do," cried the lawyer. "You've put your foot in it. You had no right to do what you did."

"The whole thing is mine, Michael," protested the old gentleman. "I founded and nursed that business on principles entirely of my own."

"That's all very fine," said the lawyer; "but you made an assignment, you were forced to make it, too; even then your position was extremely shaky; but now, my dear sir, it means the dock."

"It isn't possible," cried Joseph; "the law cannot be so unjust as that?"

"And the cream of the thing," interrupted Michael, with a sudden shout of laughter, "the cream of the thing is this, that of course you've downed the leather business! I must say, Uncle Joseph, you have strange ideas of law, but I like your taste in humour."

"I see nothing to laugh at," observed Mr. Finsbury tartly.

"And talking of that, has Morris any power to sign for the firm?" asked Michael.

"No one but myself," replied Joseph.

"Poor devil of a Morris! O, poor devil of a Morris!" cried the lawyer in delight. "And his keeping up the farce that you're at home! O, Morris, the Lord has delivered you into my hands! Let me see, Uncle Joseph, what do you suppose the leather business worth?"

"It *was* worth a hundred thousand," said Joseph bitterly, "when it was in my hands. But then there came a Scotsman—it is supposed he had a certain talent—it was entirely directed to book-keeping—no accountant in London could understand a word of any of his books; and then there was Morris, who is perfectly incompetent. And now it is worth very little. Morris tried to sell it last year; and Pogram and Jarris offered only four thousand."

"I shall turn my attention to leather," said Michael with decision.

"You?" asked Joseph. "I advise you not. There is nothing in the whole field of commerce more surprising than the fluctuations of the leather market. Its sensitiveness may be described as morbid."

"And now, Uncle Joseph, what have you done with all that money?" asked the lawyer.

"Paid it into a bank and drew twenty pounds," answered Mr. Finsbury promptly. "Why?"

"Very well," said Michael. "To-morrow I shall send down a clerk with a cheque for a hundred, and he'll draw out the original sum and return it to the Anglo-Patagonian, with some sort of explanation which I will try to invent for you. That will clear your feet, and as Morris can't touch a penny of it without forgery, it will do no harm to my little scheme."

"But what am I to do?" asked Joseph; "I cannot live upon nothing."

"Don't you hear?" returned Michael. "I send you a cheque for a hundred; which leaves you eighty to go along upon; and when that's done, apply to me again."

"I would rather not be beholden to your bounty all the same," said Joseph, biting at his white moustache. "I would rather live on my own money, since I have it."

Michael grasped his arm. "Will nothing make you believe," he cried, "that I am trying to save you from Dartmoor?"

His earnestness staggered the old man. "I must turn my attention to law," he said; "it will be a new field; for though, of course, I understand its general principles, I have never really applied my mind to the details, and this view of yours, for example, comes on me entirely by surprise. But you may be right, and of course at my time of life—for I am no longer young—any really long term of imprisonment would be highly prejudicial. But, my dear nephew, I have no claim on you; you have no call to support me."

"That's all right," said Michael; "I'll probably get it out of the leather business."

And having taken down the old gentleman's address, Michael left him at the corner of a street.

"What a wonderful old muddler!" he reflected, "and what a singular thing is life! I seem to be condemned to be the instrument of Providence. Let me see; what have I done to-day? Disposed of a dead body, saved Pitman, saved my Uncle Joseph, brightened up Forsyth, and drunk a devil of a lot of most indifferent liquor. Let's top off with a visit to my cousins, and be the instrument of Providence in earnest. To-morrow I can turn my attention to leather; to-night I'll just make it lively for 'em in a friendly spirit."

About a quarter of an hour later, as the clocks were striking eleven, the instrument of Providence descended from a hansom, and, bidding the driver wait, rapped at the door of No. 16 John Street.

It was promptly opened by Morris.

"O, it's you, Michael," he said, carefully blocking up the narrow opening: "it's very late."

Michael without a word reached forth, grasped Morris warmly by the hand, and gave it so extreme a squeeze that the sullen householder fell back. Profiting by this movement, the lawyer obtained a footing in the lobby and marched into the dining-room, with Morris at his heels.

"Where's my Uncle Joseph?" demanded Michael, sitting down in the most comfortable chair.

" He's not been very well lately," replied Morris ; " he's staying at Browndean ; John is nursing him ; and I am alone, as you see."

Michael smiled to himself. " I want to see him on particular business," he said.

" You can't expect to see my uncle when you won't let me see your father," returned Morris.

" Fiddlestick," said Michael. " My father is my father ; but Joseph is just as much my uncle as he's yours ; and you have no right to sequestrate his person."

" I do no such thing," said Morris doggedly. " He is not well, he is dangerously ill and nobody can see him."

" I'll tell you what, then," said Michael. " I'll make a clean breast of it. I have come down like the opossum, Morris ; I have come to compromise."

Poor Morris turned as pale as death, and then a flush of wrath against the injustice of man's destiny dyed his very temples. " What do you mean ? " he cried, " I don't believe a word of it ! " And when Michael had assured him of his seriousness, " Well, then," he cried, with another deep flush, " I won't ; so you can put that in your pipe and smoke it."

" Oho ! " said Michael queerly. " You say your uncle is dangerously ill, and you won't compromise ? There's something very fishy about that."

" What do you mean ? " cried Morris hoarsely.

" I only say it's fishy," returned Michael, " that is, pertaining to the finny tribe."

" Do you mean to insinuate anything ? " cried Morris stormily, trying the high hand.

" Insinuate ? " repeated Michael. " O, don't let's begin to use awkward expressions ! Let us drown our differences in a bottle, like two affable kinsmen. *The Two Affable Kinsmen*, sometimes attributed to Shakespeare," he added.

Morris's mind was labouring like a mill. " Does he suspect ? or is this chance and stuff ? Should I soap, or

should I bully? Soap," he concluded. "It gains time. Well," said he aloud, and with rather a painful affectation of heartiness, "it's long since we have had an evening together, Michael; and though my habits (as you know) are very temperate, I may as well make an exception. Excuse me one moment till I fetch a bottle of whisky from the cellar."

"No whisky for me," said Michael; "a little of the old still champagne or nothing."

For a moment Morris stood irresolute, for the wine was very valuable: the next he had quitted the room without a word. His quick mind had perceived his advantage; in thus dunning him for the cream of the cellar, Michael was playing into his hand. "One bottle?" he thought. "By George, I'll give him two! this is no moment for economy; and once the beast is drunk, it's strange if I don't wring his secret out of him."

With two bottles, accordingly, he returned. Glasses were produced, and Morris filled them with hospitable grace.

"I drink to you, cousin!" he cried gaily. "Don't spare the wine-cup in my house."

Michael drank his glass deliberately, standing at the table; filled it again, and returned to his chair, carrying the bottle along with him.

"The spoils of war!" he said apologetically. "The weakest goes to the wall. Science, Morris, science." Morris could think of no reply, and for an appreciable interval silence reigned. But two glasses of the still champagne produced a rapid change in Michael.

"There's a want of vivacity about you, Morris," he observed. "You may be deep; but I'll be hanged if you're vivacious!"

"What makes you think me deep?" asked Morris with an air of pleased simplicity.

"Because you won't compromise," said the lawyer. "You're deep dog, Morris, very deep dog, not t' com-

promise—remarkable deep dog. And a very good glass of wine ; it's the only respectable feature in the Finsbury family, this wine ; rarer thing than a title—much rarer. Now a man with glass wine like this in cellar, I wonder why won't compromise ? "

" Well, *you* wouldn't compromise before, you know," said the smiling Morris. " Turn about is fair play."

" I wonder why *I* wouldn' compromise ? I wonder why *you* wouldn' ? " inquired Michael. " I wonder why we each think the other wouldn' ? 'S quite a remarrable —remarkable problem," he added, triumphing over oral obstacles, not without obvious pride. " Wonder what we each think—don't you ? "

" What do you suppose to have been my reason ? " asked Morris adroitly.

Michael looked at him and winked. " That's cool," said he. " Next thing, you'll ask me to help you out of the muddle. I know I'm emissary of Providence, but not that kind ! You get out of it yourself, like Æsop and the other fellow. Must be dreadful muddle for young orphan o' forty ; leather business and all ! "

" I am sure I don't know what you mean," said Morris.

" Not sure I know myself," said Michael. " This is exc'lent vintage, sir—exc'lent vintage. Nothing against the tipple. Only thing : here's a valuable uncle disappeared. Now, what I want to know : where's valuable uncle ? "

" I have told you : he is at Browndean," answered Morris, furtively wiping his brow, for these repeated hints began to tell upon him cruelly.

" Very easy say Brown—Browndee—no' so easy after all ! " cried Michael. " Easy say ; anything's easy say, when you can say it. What I don' like's total disappearance of an uncle. Not business-like." And he wagged his head.

" It is all perfectly simple," returned Morris, with

laborious calm. "There is no mystery. He stays at Browndean, where he got a shake in the accident."

"Ah!" said Michael, "got devil of a shake!"

"Why do you say that?" cried Morris sharply.

"Best possible authority. Told me so yourself," said the lawyer. "But if you tell me contrary now, of course I'm bound to believe either the one story or the other. Point is—I've upset this bottle, still champagne's exc'lent thing carpet—point is, is valuable uncle dead—an'—bury?"

Morris sprang from his seat. "What's that you say?" he gasped.

"I say it's exc'lent thing carpet," replied Michael, rising. "Exc'lent thing promote healthy action of the skin. Well, it's all one, anyway. Give my love to Uncle Champagne."

"You're not going away?" said Morris.

"Awf'ly sorry, ole man. Got to sit up sick friend," said the wavering Michael.

"You shall not go till you have explained your hints," returned Morris fiercely. "What do you mean? What brought you here?"

"No offence, I trust," said the lawyer, turning round as he opened the door; "only doing my duty as shemishery of Providence."

Groping his way to the front-door, he opened it with some difficulty, and descended the steps to the hansom. The tired driver looked up as he approached, and asked where he was to go next.

Michael observed that Morris had followed him to the steps; a brilliant inspiration came to him. "Anything t' give pain," he reflected. . . . "Drive Shcotlan' Yard," he added aloud, holding to the wheel to steady himself; "there's something devilish fishy, cabby, about those cousins. Mush' be cleared up! Drive Shcotlan' Yard."

"You don't mean that, sir," said the man, with the ready sympathy of the lower orders for an intoxicated

gentleman. " I had better take you home, sir ; you can go to Scotland Yard to-morrow."

" Is it as friend or as perfessional man you advise me not to go Shcotlan' Yard t'night ? " inquired Michael. " All righ', never min' Shcotlan' Yard, drive Gaicty bar."

" The Gaicty bar is closed," said the man.

" Then home," said Michael, with the same cheerfulness.

" Where to, sir ? "

" I don't remember, I'm sure," said Michael, entering the vehicle, " drive Shcotlan' Yard and ask."

" But you'll have a card," said the man, through the little aperture in the top, " give me your card-case."

" What imagi—imagination in a cabby ! " cried the lawyer, producing his card-case, and handing it to the driver.

The man read it by the light of the lamp. " Mr. Michael Finsbury, 233 King's Road, Chelsea. Is that it, sir ? "

" Right you are," cried Michael, " drive there if you can see way."

CHAPTER X

GIDEON FORSYTH AND THE BROADWOOD GRAND

The reader has perhaps read that remarkable work, "Who Put Back the Clock?" by E. H. B., which appeared for several days upon the railway bookstalls and then vanished entirely from the face of the earth. Whether eating Time makes the chief of his diet out of old editions; whether Providence has passed a special enactment on behalf of authors; or whether these last have taken the law into their own hand, bound themselves into a dark conspiracy with a password, which I would die rather than reveal, and night after night sally forth under some vigorous leader, such as Mr. James Payn or Mr. Walter Besant, on their task of secret spoliation—certain it is, at least, that the old editions pass, giving place to new. To the proof, it is believed there are now only three copies extant of "Who Put Back the Clock?" one in the British Museum, successfully concealed by a wrong entry in the catalogue; another in one of the cellars (the cellar where the music accumulates) of the Advocates' Library at Edinburgh; and a third, bound in morocco, in the possession of Gideon Forsyth. To account for the very different fate attending this third exemplar, the readiest theory is to suppose that Gideon admired the tale. How to explain that admiration might appear (to those who have perused the work) more difficult; but the weakness of a parent is extreme, and Gideon (and not his uncle, whose initials he had humorously borrowed) was the author of "Who Put Back the Clock?" He had never acknowledged it, or only to some intimate friends while it was still in proof; after its appearance and

alarming failure, the modesty of the novelist had become more pressing, and the secret was now likely to be better kept than that of the authorship of " Waverley."

A copy of the work (for the date of my tale is already yesterday) still figured in dusty solitude in the bookstall at Waterloo ; and Gideon, as he passed with his ticket for Hampton Court, smiled contemptuously at the creature of his thoughts. What an idle ambition was the author's ! How far beneath him was the practice of that childish art ! With his hand closing on his first brief, he felt himself a man at last ; and the muse who presides over the police romance, a lady presumably of French extraction, fled his neighbourhood, and returned to join the dance round the springs of Helicon, among her Grecian sisters.

Robust, practical reflection still cheered the young barrister upon his journey. Again and again he selected the little country-house in its islet of great oaks, which he was to make his future home. Like a prudent householder, he projected improvements as he passed ; to one he added a stable, to another a tennis-court, a third he supplied with a becoming rustic boat-house.

" How little a while ago," he could not but reflect, " I was a careless young dog with no thought but to be comfortable ! I cared for nothing but boating and detective novels. I would have passed an old-fashioned country-house with large kitchen-garden, stabling, boat-house, and spacious offices, without so much as a look, and certainly would have made no inquiry as to the drains. How a man ripens with the years ! "

The intelligent reader will perceive the ravages of Miss Hazeltine. Gideon had carried Julia straight to Mr. Bloomfield's house ; and that gentleman, having been led to understand she was the victim of oppression, had noisily espoused her cause. He worked himself into a fine breathing heat ; in which, to a man of his temperament, action became needful.

" I do not know which is the worse," he cried, " the

fraudulent old villain or the unmanly young cub. I will write to the *Pall Mall* and expose them. Nonsense, sir; they must be exposed! It's a public duty. Did you not tell me the fellow was a Tory? O, the uncle is a Radical lecturer, is he? No doubt the uncle has been grossly wronged. But of course, as you say, that makes a change; it becomes scarce so much a public duty."

And he sought and instantly found a fresh outlet for his alacrity. Miss Hazeltine (he now perceived) must be kept out of the way; his houseboat was lying ready—he had returned but a day or two before from his usual cruise; there was no place like a houseboat for concealment; and that very morning, in the teeth of the easterly gale, Mr. and Mrs. Bloomfield and Miss Julia Hazeltine had started forth on their untimely voyage. Gideon pled in vain to be allowed to join the party. "No, Gid," said his uncle. "You will be watched; you must keep away from us." Nor had the barrister ventured to contest this strange illusion; for he feared if he rubbed off any of the romance, that Mr. Bloomfield might weary of the whole affair. And his discretion was rewarded; for the Squirradical, laying a heavy hand upon his nephew's shoulder, had added these notable expressions: "I see what you are after, Gid. But if you're going to get the girl, you have to work, sir."

These pleasing sounds had cheered the barrister all day, as he sat reading in chambers; they continued to form the ground-base of his manly musings as he was whirled to Hampton Court; even when he landed at the station, and began to pull himself together for his delicate interview, the voice of Uncle Ned and the eyes of Julia were not forgotten.

But now it began to rain surprises: in all Hampton Court there was no Kurnaul Villa, no Count Tarnow, and no count. This was strange; but, viewed in the light of the incoherency of his instructions, not perhaps inexplicable; Mr. Dickson had been lunching, and he might have made some fatal oversight in the address. What was

the thoroughly prompt, manly, and business-like step? thought Gideon; and he answered himself at once: "A telegram, very laconic." Speedily the wires were flashing the following very important missive: "Dickson, Langham Hotel. Villa and persons both unknown here, suppose erroneous address; follow self next train.—Forsyth." And at the Langham Hotel, sure enough, with a brow expressive of despatch and intellectual effort, Gideon descended not long after from a smoking hansom.

I do not suppose that Gideon will ever forget the Langham Hotel. No Count Tarnow was one thing; no John Dickson and no Ezra Thomas, quite another. How, why, and what next, danced in his bewildered brain; from every centre of what we playfully call the human intellect incongruous messages were telegraphed; and before the hubbub of dismay had quite subsided, the barrister found himself driving furiously for his chambers. There was at least a cave of refuge; it was at least a place to think in; and he climbed the stair, put his key in the lock and opened the door, with some approach to hope.

It was all dark within, for the night had some time fallen; but Gideon knew his room, he knew where the matches stood on the end of the chimney-piece; and he advanced boldly, and in so doing dashed himself against a heavy body; where (slightly altering the expressions of the song) no heavy body should have been. There had been nothing there when Gideon went out; he had locked the door behind him, he had found it locked on his return, no one could have entered, the furniture could not have changed its own position. And yet undeniably there was a something there. He thrust out his hands in the darkness. Yes, there was something, something large, something smooth, something cold.

"Heaven forgive me!" said Gideon, "it feels like a piano."

And the next moment he remembered the vestas in his waistcoat-pocket and had struck a light.

It was indeed a piano that met his doubtful gaze ; a vast and costly instrument, stained with the rains of the afternoon and defaced with recent scratches. The light of the vesta was reflected from the varnished sides, like a star in quiet water ; and in the farther end of the room the shadow of that strange visitor loomed bulkily and wavered on the wall.

Gideon let the match burn to his fingers, and the darkness closed once more on his bewilderment. Then with trembling hands he lit the lamp and drew near. Near or far, there was no doubt of the fact : the thing was a piano. There, where by all the laws of God and man it was impossible that it should be—there the thing impudently stood. Gideon threw open the key-board and struck a chord. Not a sound disturbed the quiet of the room. " Is there anything wrong with me ? " he thought, with a pang ; and drawing in a seat, obstinately persisted in his attempts to ravish silence, now with sparkling arpeggios, now with a sonata of Beethoven's which (in happier days) he knew to be one of the loudest pieces of that powerful composer. Still not a sound. He gave the Broadwood two great bangs with his clenched first. All was still as the grave.

The young barrister started to his feet.

" I am stark-staring mad," he cried aloud, " and no one knows it but myself. God's worst curse has fallen on me."

His fingers encountered his watch-chain ; instantly he had plucked forth his watch and held it to his ear. He could hear it ticking.

" I am not deaf," he said aloud. " I am only insane. My mind has quitted me for ever."

He looked uneasily about the room, and gazed with lack-lustre eyes at the chair in which Mr. Dickson had installed himself. The end of a cigar lay near on the fender.

" No," he thought, " I don't believe that was a dream ; but God knows my mind is failing rapidly. I seem to be hungry, for instance ; it's probably another hallucination.

Still I might try. I shall have one more good meal; I shall go to the Café Royal, and may possibly be removed from there direct to the asylum."

He wondered with morbid interest, as he descended the stairs, how he would first betray his terrible condition—would he attack a waiter? or eat glass?—and when he had mounted into a cab, he bade the man drive to Nichol's, with a lurking fear that there was no such place.

The flaring, gassy entrance of the café speedily set his mind at rest; he was cheered besides to recognise his favourite waiter; his orders appeared to be coherent; the dinner, when it came, was quite a sensible meal, and he ate it with enjoyment. "Upon my word," he reflected, "I am about tempted to indulge a hope. Have I been hasty? Have I done what Robert Skill would have done?" Robert Skill (I need scarcely mention) was the name of the principal character in "Who Put Back the Clock?" It had occurred to the author as a brilliant and probable invention; to readers of a critical turn, Robert appeared scarce upon a level with his surname; but it is the difficulty of the police romance, that the reader is always a man of such vastly greater ingenuity than the writer. In the eyes of his creator, however, Robert Skill was a word to conjure with; the thought braced and spurred him; what that brilliant creature would have done Gideon would do also. This frame of mind is not uncommon; the distressed general, the baited divine, the hesitating author, decide severally to do what Napoleon, what St. Paul, what Shakespeare would have done; and there remains only the minor question, What is that? In Gideon's case one thing was clear: Skill was a man of singular decision, he would have taken some step (whatever it was) at once; and the only step that Gideon could think of was to return to his chambers.

This being achieved, all further inspiration failed him, and he stood pitifully staring at the instrument of his confusion. To touch the keys again was more than he durst

venture on; whether they had maintained their former silence, or responded with the tones of the last trump, it would have equally dethroned his resolution. "It may be a practical jest," he reflected, "though it seems elaborate and costly. And yet what else can it be? It *must* be a practical jest." And just then his eye fell upon a feature which seemed corroborative of that view: the pagoda of cigars which Michael had erected ere he left the chambers. "Why that?" reflected Gideon. "It seems entirely irresponsible." And drawing near, he gingerly demolished it. "A key," he thought. "Why that? And why so conspicuously placed?" He made the circuit of the instrument, and perceived the keyhole at the back. "Aha! this is what the key is for," said he. "They wanted me to look inside. Stranger and stranger." And with that he turned the key and raised the lid.

In what antics of agony, in what fits of flighty resolution, in what collapses of despair, Gideon consumed the night, it would be ungenerous to inquire too closely.

That trill of tiny song with which the eaves-birds of London welcome the approach of day found him limp and rumpled and bloodshot, and with a mind still vacant of resource. He rose and looked forth unrejoicingly on blinded windows, an empty street, and the grey daylight dotted with the yellow lamps. There are mornings when the city seems to awake with a sick headache; this was one of them; and still the twittering reveillé of the sparrows stirred in Gideon's spirit.

"Day here," he thought, "and I still helpless! This must come to an end." And he locked up the piano, put the key in his pocket, and set forth in quest of coffee. As he went, his mind trudged for the hundredth time a certain mill-road of terrors, misgivings, and regrets. To call in the police, to give up the body, to cover London with handbills describing John Dickson and Ezra Thomas, to fill the papers with paragraphs, *Mysterious Occurrence in the Temple—Mr. Forsyth admitted to bail*, this was one course,

an easy course, a safe course; but not, the more he reflected on it, not a pleasant one. For, was it not to publish abroad a number of singular facts about himself? A child ought to have seen through the story of these adventurers, and he had gaped and swallowed it. A barrister of the least self-respect should have refused to listen to clients who came before him in a manner so irregular, and he had listened. And O, if he had only listened; but he had gone upon their errand—he, a barrister, uninstructed even by the shadow of a solicitor—upon an errand fit only for a private detective; and alas!—and for the hundredth time the blood surged to his brow—he had taken their money! "No," said he, "the thing is as plain as St. Paul's. I shall be dishonoured! I have smashed my career for a five-pound note."

Between the possibility of being hanged in all innocence, and the certainty of a public and merited disgrace, no gentleman of spirit could long hesitate. After three gulps of that hot, snuffy, and muddy beverage, that passes on the streets of London for a decoction of the coffee berry, Gideon's mind was made up. He would do without the police. He must face the other side of the dilemma, and be Robert Skill in earnest. What would Robert Skill have done? How does a gentleman dispose of a dead body, honestly come by? He remembered the inimitable story of the hunchback; reviewed its course, and dismissed it for a worthless guide. It was impossible to prop a corpse on the corner of Tottenham Court Road without arousing fatal curiosity in the bosoms of the passers-by; as for lowering it down a London chimney, the physical obstacles were insurmountable. To get it on board a train and drop it out, or on the top of an omnibus and drop it off, were equally out of the question. To get it on a yacht and drop it overboard, was more conceivable; but for a man of moderate means it seemed extravagant. The hire of the yacht was in itself a consideration; the subsequent support of the whole crew (which seemed a necessary consequence) was

simply not to be thought of. His uncle and the houseboat here occurred in very luminous colours to his mind. A musical composer (say, of the name of Jimson) might very well suffer, like Hogarth's musician before him, from the disturbances of London. He might very well be pressed for time to finish an opera—say the comic opera *Orange Pekoe—Orange Pekoe*, music by Jimson—" this young maëstro, one of the most promising of our recent English school "—vigorous entrance of the drums, etc.—the whole character of Jimson and his music arose in bulk before the mind of Gideon. What more likely than Jimson's arrival with a grand piano (say, at Padwick), and his residence in a houseboat alone with the unfinished score of *Orange Pekoe ?* His subsequent disappearance, leaving nothing behind but an empty piano case, it might be more difficult to account for. And yet even that was susceptible of explanation. For, suppose Jimson had gone mad over a fugal passage, and had thereupon destroyed the accomplice of his infamy, and plunged into the welcome river ? What end, on the whole, more probable for a modern musician ?

" By Jove, I'll do it," cried Gideon. " Jimson is the boy ! "

CHAPTER XI

THE MAËSTRO JIMSON

Mr. Edward Hugh Bloomfield having announced his intention to stay in the neighbourhood of Maidenhead, what more probable than that the Maëstro Jimson should turn his mind toward Padwick? Near this pleasant river-side village he remembered to have observed an ancient, weedy houseboat lying moored beside a tuft of willows. It had stirred in him, in his careless hours, as he pulled down the river under a more familiar name, a certain sense of the romantic; and when the nice contrivance of his story was already complete in his mind, he had come near pulling it all down again, like an ungrateful clock, in order to introduce a chapter in which Richard Skill (who was always being decoyed somewhere) should be decoyed on board that lonely hulk by Lord Bellew and the American desperado Gin Sling. It was fortunate he had not done so, he reflected, since the hulk was now required for very different purposes.

Jimson, a man of inconspicuous costume, but insinuating manners, had little difficulty in finding the hireling who had charge of the houseboat, and still less in persuading him to resign his care. The rent was almost nominal, the entry immediate, the key was exchanged against a suitable advance in money, and Jimson returned to town by the afternoon train to see about despatching his piano.

"I will be down to-morrow," he had said reassuringly. "My opera is waited for with such impatience, you know."

And, sure enough, about the hour of noon on the

following day, Jimson might have been observed ascending the river-side road that goes from Padwick to Great Haverham, carrying in one hand a basket of provisions, and under the other arm a leather case containing (it is to be conjectured) the score of *Orange Pekoe.* It was October weather; the stone-grey sky was full of larks, the leaden mirror of the Thames brightened with autumnal foliage, and the fallen leaves of the chestnuts chirped under the composer's footing. There is no time of the year in England more courageous; and Jimson, though he was not without his troubles, whistled as he went.

A little above Padwick the river lies very solitary. On the opposite shore the trees of a private park enclose the view, the chimneys of the mansion just pricking forth above their clusters; on the near side the path is bordered by willows. Close among these lay the houseboat, a thing so soiled by the tears of the overhanging willows, so grown upon with parasites, so decayed, so battered, so neglected, such a haunt of rats, so advertised a storehouse of rheumatic agonies, that the heart of an intending occupant might well recoil. A plank, by way of flying drawbridge, joined it to the shore. And it was a dreary moment for Jimson when he pulled this after him and found himself alone on this unwholesome fortress. He could hear the rats scuttle and flop in the abhorred interior; the key cried among the wards like a thing in pain; the sitting-room was deep in dust, and smelt strong of bilge-water. It could not be called a cheerful spot, even for a composer absorbed in beloved toil; how much less for a young gentleman haunted by alarms and awaiting the arrival of a corpse!

He sat down, cleared away a piece of the table, and attacked the cold luncheon in his basket In case of any subsequent inquiry into the fate of Jimson, it was desirable he should be little seen: in other words, that he should spend the day entirely in the house. To this end, and further to corroborate his fable, he had brought in the leather case not only writing materials, but a ream of

large-size music paper, such as he considered suitable for an ambitious character like Jimson's.

"And now to work," said he, when he had satisfied his appetite. "We must leave traces of the wretched man's activity." And he wrote in bold characters:

ORANGE PEKOE.
Op. 17.
J. B. JIMSON.
Vocal and p. f. score.

"I suppose they never do begin like this," reflected Gideon; "but then it's quite out of the question for me to tackle a full score, and Jimson was so unconventional. A dedication would be found convincing, I believe. 'Dedicated to' (let me see) 'to William Ewart Gladstone, by his obedient servant the composer.' And now some music: I had better avoid the overture; it seems to present difficulties. Let's give an air for the tenor: key—O, something modern!—seven sharps." And he made a business-like signature across the staves, and then paused and browsed for a while on the handle of his pen. Melody, with no better inspiration than a sheet of paper, is not usually found to spring unbidden in the mind of the amateur; nor is the key of seven sharps a place of much repose to the untried. He cast away that sheet. "It will help to build up the character of Jimson," Gideon remarked, and again waited on the muse, in various keys and on divers sheets of paper, but all with results so inconsiderable that he stood aghast. "It's very odd," thought he. "I seem to have less fancy than I thought, or this is an off-day with me; yet Jimson must leave something." And again he bent himself to the task.

Presently the penetrating chill of the houseboat began to attack the very seat of life. He desisted from his unremunerative trial, and, to the audible annoyance of the rats, walked briskly up and down the cabin. Still he was cold. "This is all nonsense," said he. "I don't care

about the risk, but I will not catch a catarrh. I must get out of this den."

He stepped on deck, and passing to the bow of his embarkation, looked for the first time up the river. He started. Only a few hundred yards above another house-boat lay moored among the willows. It was very spick-and-span, an elegant canoe hung at the stern, the windows were concealed by snowy curtains, a flag floated from a staff. The more Gideon looked at it, the more there mingled with his disgust a sense of impotent surprise. It was very like his uncle's houseboat; it was exceedingly like—it was identical. But for two circumstances, he could have sworn it was the same. The first, that his uncle had gone to Maidenhead, might be explained away by that flightiness of purpose which is so common a trait among the more than usually manly. The second, however, was conclusive: it was not in the least like Mr. Bloomfield to display a banner on his floating residence; and if he ever did, it would certainly be dyed in hues of emblematical propriety. Now the Squirradical, like the vast majority of the more manly, had drawn knowledge at the wells of Cambridge—he was wooden spoon in the year 1850; and the flag upon the houseboat streamed on the afternoon air with the colours of that seat of Toryism, that cradle of Puseyism, that home of the inexact and the effete—Oxford.

Still it was strangely like, thought Gideon.

And as he thus looked and thought, the door opened, and a young lady stepped forth on deck. The barrister dropped and fled into his cabin—it was Julia Hazeltine! Through the window he watched her draw in the canoe, get on board of it, cast off, and come dropping down stream in his direction.

"Well, all is up now," said he, and he fell on a seat.

"Good-afternoon, miss," said a voice on the water. Gideon knew it for the voice of his landlord.

"Good-afternoon," replied Julia, "but I don't know

who you are; do I? O yes, I do though. You are the nice man that gave us leave to sketch from the old houseboat."

Gideon's heart leaped with fear.

"That's it," returned the man. "And what I wanted to say was as you couldn't do it any more. You see I've let it."

"Let it!" cried Julia.

"Let it for a month," said the man. "Seems strange, don't it? Can't see what the party wants with it!"

"It seems very romantic of him, I think," said Julia, "What sort of a person is he?"

Julia in her canoe, the landlord in his wherry, were close alongside, and holding on by the gunwale of the houseboat; so that not a word was lost on Gideon.

"He's a music-man," said the landlord, "or at least that's what he told me, miss; come down here to write an op'ra."

"Really!" cried Julia, "I never heard of anything so delightful! Why, we shall be able to slip down at night and hear him improvise! What is his name?"

"Jimson," said the man.

"Jimson?" repeated Julia, and interrogated her memory in vain. But indeed our rising school of English music boasts so many professors that we rarely hear of one till he is made a baronet. "Are you sure you have it right?"

"Made him spell it to me," replied the landlord. "J-I-M-S-O-N—Jimson; and his op'ra's called—some kind of tea."

"*Some kind of tea!*" cried the girl. "What a very singular name for an opera! What can it be about?" And Gideon heard her pretty laughter flow abroad. "We must try to get acquainted with this Mr. Jimson; I feel sure he must be nice."

"Well, miss, I'm afraid I must be going on. I've got to be at Haverham, you see."

" O, don't let me keep you, you kind man ! " said Julia. " Good-afternoon."

" Good-afternoon to you, miss."

Gideon sat in the cabin a prey to the most harrowing thoughts. Here he was anchored to a rotting houseboat, soon to be anchored to it still more emphatically by the presence of the corpse, and here was the country buzzing about him, and young ladies already proposing pleasure parties to surround his house at night. Well, that meant the gallows ; and much he cared for that. What troubled him now was Julia's indescribable levity. That girl would scrape acquaintance with anybody ; she had no reserve, none of the enamel of the lady. She was familiar with a brute like his landlord ; she took an immediate interest (which she lacked even the delicacy to conceal) in a creature like Jimson ! He could conceive her asking Jimson to have tea with her ! And it was for a girl like this that a man like Gideon—— Down, manly heart !

He was interrupted by a sound that sent him whipping behind the door in a trice. Miss Hazeltine had stepped on board the houseboat. Her sketch was promising ; judging from the stillness, she supposed Jimson not yet come ; and she had decided to seize occasion and complete the work of art. Down she sat therefore in the bow, produced her block and water-colours, and was soon singing over (what used to be called) the ladylike accomplishment. Now and then indeed her song was interrupted, as she searched in her memory for some of the odious little receipts by means of which the game is practised—or used to be practised in the brave days of old ; they say the world, and those ornaments of the world, young ladies, are become more sophisticated now ; but Julia had probably studied under Pitman, and she stood firm in the old ways.

Gideon, meanwhile, stood behind the door, afraid to move, afraid to breathe, afraid to think of what must follow, racked by confinement and borne to the ground with tedium. This particular phase, he felt with gratitude,

could not last for ever; whatever impended (even the gallows, he bitterly and perhaps erroneously reflected) could not fail to be a relief. To calculate cubes occurred to him as an ingenious and even profitable refuge from distressing thoughts, and he threw his manhood into that dreary exercise.

Thus, then, were these two young persons occupied—Gideon attacking the perfect number with resolution; Julia vigorously stippling incongruous colours on her block, when Providence despatched into these waters a steam-launch asthmatically panting up the Thames. All along the banks the water swelled and fell, and the reeds rustled. The houseboat itself, that ancient stationary creature, became suddenly imbued with life, and rolled briskly at her moorings, like a sea-going ship when she begins to smell the harbour bar. The wash had nearly died away, and the quick panting of the launch sounded already faint and far off, when Gideon was startled by a cry from Julia. Peering through the window, he beheld her staring disconsolately down stream at the fast-vanishing canoe. The barrister (whatever were his faults) displayed on this occasion a promptitude worthy of his hero, Robert Skill; with one effort of his mind he foresaw what was about to follow; with one movement of his body he dropped to the floor and crawled under the table.

Julia, on her part, was not yet alive to her position. She saw she had lost the canoe, and she looked forward with something less than avidity to her next interview with Mr. Bloomfield; but she had no idea that she was imprisoned, for she knew of the plank bridge.

She made the circuit of the house, and found the door open and the bridge withdrawn. It was plain, then, that Jimson must have come; plain, too, that he must be on board. He must be a very shy man to have suffered this invasion of his residence, and made no sign; and her courage rose higher at the thought. He must come now, she must force him from his privacy, for the plank was

too heavy for her single strength ; so she tapped upon the open door. Then she tapped again.

" Mr. Jimson," she cried, " Mr. Jimson ! here, come ! —you *must* come, you know, sooner or later, for I can't get off without you. O, don't be so exceedingly silly ! O, please, come ! "

Still there was no reply.

" If he *is* here he must be mad," she thought, with a little fear. And the next moment she remembered he had probably gone aboard like herself in a boat. In that case she might as well see the houseboat, and she pushed open the door and stepped in. Under the table, where he lay smothered with dust, Gideon's heart stood still.

There were the remains of Jimson's lunch. " He likes rather nice things to eat," she thought. " O, I am sure he is quite a delightful man. I wonder if he is as good-looking as Mr. Forsyth. Mrs. Jimson—I don't believe it sounds as nice as Mrs. Forsyth ; but then ' Gideon ' is so really odious ! And here is some of his music too ; this is delightful. *Orange Pekoe*—O, that's what he meant by some kind of tea." And she trilled with laughter. " *Adagio molto espressivo, sempre legato,*" she read next. (For the literary part of a composer's business Gideon was well equipped.) " How very strange to have all these directions, and only three or four notes ! O, here's another with some more. *Andante patetico.*" And she began to glance over the music. " O dear me," she thought, " he must be terribly modern ! It all seems discords to me. Let's try the air. It is very strange, it seems familiar." She began to sing it, and suddenly broke off with laughter. " Why, it's ' Tommy make room for your Uncle ! ' " she cried aloud, so that the soul of Gideon was filled with bitterness. " *Andante patetico,* indeed ! The man must be a mere impostor."

And just at this moment there came a confused, scuffling sound from underneath the table ; a strange note, like that of a barn-door fowl, ushered in a most explosive sneeze ;

the head of the sufferer was at the same time brought smartly in contact with the boards above; and the sneeze was followed by a hollow groan.

Julia fled to the door, and there, with the salutary instinct of the brave, turned and faced the danger. There was no pursuit. The sounds continued; below the table a crouching figure was indistinctly to be seen jostled by the throes of a sneezing-fit; and that was all.

"Surely," thought Julia, "this is most unusual behaviour. He cannot be a man of the world!"

Meanwhile the dust of years had been disturbed by the young barrister's convulsions; and the sneezing-fit was succeeded by a passionate access of coughing.

Julia began to feel a certain interest. "I am afraid you are really quite ill," she said, drawing a little nearer. "Please don't let me put you out, and do not stay under that table, Mr. Jimson. Indeed it cannot be good for you."

Mr. Jimson only answered by a distressing cough; and the next moment the girl was on her knees, and their faces had almost knocked together under the table.

"O, my gracious goodness!" exclaimed Miss Hazeltine, and sprang to her feet. "Mr. Forsyth gone mad!"

"I am not mad," said the gentleman ruefully, extricating himself from his position. "Dearest Miss Hazeltine, I vow to you upon my knees I am not mad!"

"You are not!" she cried, panting.

"I know," he said, "that to a superficial eye my conduct may appear unconventional."

"If you are not mad, it was no conduct at all," cried the girl, with a flash of colour, "and showed you did not care one penny for my feelings!"

"This is the very devil and all. I know—I admit that," cried Gideon, with a great effort of manly candour.

"It was abominable conduct!" said Julia, with energy.

"I know it must have shaken your esteem," said the

barrister. "But, dearest Miss Hazeltine, I beg of you to hear me out; my behaviour, strange as it may seem, is not unsusceptible of explanation; and I positively cannot and will not consent to continue to try to exist without—without the esteem of one whom I admire—the moment is ill chosen, I am well aware of that; but I repeat the expression—one whom I admire."

A touch of amusement appeared on Miss Hazeltine's face. "Very well," said she, "come out of this dreadfully cold place, and let us sit down on deck." The barrister dolefully followed her. "Now," said she, making herself comfortable against the end of the house, "go on. I will hear you out." And then, seeing him stand before her with so much obvious disrelish to the task, she was suddenly overcome with laughter. Julia's laugh was a thing to ravish lovers; she rolled her mirthful descant with the freedom and the melody of a blackbird's song upon the river, and repeated by the echoes of the farther bank. It seemed a thing in its own place and a sound native to the open air. There was only one creature who heard it without joy, and that was her unfortunate admirer.

"Miss Hazeltine," he said, in a voice that tottered with annoyance, "I speak as your sincere well-wisher, but this can only be called levity."

Julia made great eyes at him.

"I can't withdraw the word," he said: "already the freedom with which I heard you hobnobbing with a boatman gave me exquisite pain. Then there was a want of reserve about Jimson——"

"But Jimson appears to be yourself," objected Julia.

"I am far from denying that," cried the barrister, "but you did not know it at the time. What could Jimson be to you? Who was Jimson? Miss Hazeltine, it cut me to the heart."

"Really this seems to me to be very silly," returned Julia, with severe decision. "You have behaved in the most extraordinary manner; you pretend you are able

to explain your conduct, and instead of doing so you begin to attack me."

"I am well aware of that," replied Gideon. "I—I will make a clean breast of it. When you know all the circumstances you will be able to excuse me."

And sitting down beside her on the deck, he poured forth his miserable history.

"O, Mr. Forsyth," she cried, when he had done, "I am—so—sorry! I wish I hadn't laughed at you—only you know you really were so exceedingly funny. But I wish I hadn't, and I wouldn't either if I had only known." And she gave him her hand.

Gideon kept it in his own. "You do not think the worse of me for this?" he asked tenderly.

"Because you have been so silly and got into such dreadful trouble? you poor boy, no!" cried Julia; and, in the warmth of the moment, reached him her other hand; "you may count on me," she added.

"Really?" said Gideon.

"Really and really!" replied the girl.

"I do then, and I will," cried the young man. "I admit the moment is not well chosen; but I have no friends —to speak of."

"No more have I," said Julia. "But don't you think it's perhaps time you gave me back my hands?"

"*La ci darem la mano*," said the barrister, "the merest moment more! I have so few friends," he added.

"I thought it was considered such a bad account of a young man to have no friends," observed Julia.

"O, but I have crowds of *friends!*" cried Gideon. "That's not what I mean. I feel the moment is ill chosen; but O, Julia, if you could only see yourself!"

"Mr. Forsyth——"

"Don't call me by that beastly name!" cried the youth. "Call me Gideon!"

"O, never that!" from Julia. "Besides, we have known each other such a short time."

" Not at all ! " protested Gideon. " We met at Bournemouth ever so long ago. I never forgot you since. Say you never forgot me. Say you never forgot me, and call me Gideon ! "

" Isn't this rather—a want of reserve about Jimson ? " inquired the girl.

" O, I know I am an ass," cried the barrister, " and I don't care a halfpenny ! I know I'm an ass, and you may laugh at me to your heart's delight." And as Julia's lips opened with a smile, he once more dropped into music. " There's the Land of Cherry Isle ! " he sang, courting her with his eyes.

" It's like an opera," said Julia, rather faintly.

" What should it be ? " said Gideon. " Am I not Jimson ? It would be strange if I did not serenade my love. O yes, I mean the word, my Julia ; and I mean to win you. I am in dreadful trouble, and I have not a penny of my own, and I have cut the silliest figure ; and yet I mean to win you, Julia. Look at me, if you can, and tell me no ! "

She looked at him ; and whatever her eyes may have told him, it is to be supposed he took a pleasure in the message, for he read it a long while.

" And Uncle Ned will give us some money to go on upon in the meanwhile," he said at last.

" Well, I call that cool ! " said a cheerful voice at his elbow.

Gideon and Julia sprang apart with wonderful alacrity ; the latter annoyed to observe that although they had never moved since they sat down, they were now quite close together ; both presenting faces of a very heightened colour to the eyes of Mr. Edward Hugh Bloomfield. That gentleman, coming up the river in his boat, had captured the truant canoe, and divining what had happened, had thought to steal a march upon Miss Hazeltine at her sketch. He had unexpectedly brought down two birds with one stone ; and as he looked upon the pair of flushed

and breathless culprits, the pleasant human instinct of the matchmaker softened his heart.

"Well, I call that cool," he repeated; "you seem to count very securely upon Uncle Ned. But look here, Gid, I thought I had told you to keep away?"

"To keep away from Maidenhead," replied Gid. "But how should I expect to find you here?"

"There is something in that," Mr. Bloomfield admitted. "You see I thought it better that even you should be ignorant of my address; those rascals, the Finsburys, would have wormed it out of you. And just to put them off the scent I hoisted these abominable colours. But that is not all, Gid; you promised me to work, and here I find you playing the fool at Padwick."

"Please, Mr. Bloomfield, you must not be hard on Mr. Forsyth," said Julia. "Poor boy, he is in dreadful straits."

"What's this, Gid?" inquired the uncle. "Have you been fighting? or is it a bill?"

These, in the opinion of the Squirradical, were the two misfortunes incident to gentlemen; and indeed both were culled from his own career. He had once put his name (as a matter of form) on a friend's paper; it had cost him a cool thousand; and the friend had gone about with the fear of death upon him ever since, and never turned a corner without scouting in front of him for Mr. Bloomfield and the oaken staff. As for fighting, the Squirradical was always on the brink of it; and once, when (in the character of president of a Radical club) he had cleared out the hall of his opponents, things had gone even further. Mr. Holtum, the Conservative candidate, who lay so long on the bed of sickness, was prepared to swear to Mr. Bloomfield. "I will swear to it in any court—it was the hand of that brute that struck me down," he was reported to have said; and when he was thought to be sinking, it was known that he had made an *ante-mortem* statement in that sense. It was a cheerful day for the Squirradical when Holtum was restored to his brewery.

" It's much worse than that," said Gideon ; " a combination of circumstances really providentially unjust—a —in fact, a syndicate of murderers seem to have perceived my latent ability to rid them of the traces of their crime. It's a legal study after all, you see ! " And with these words, Gideon, for the second time that day, began to describe the adventures of the Broadwood Grand.

" I must write to the *Times*," cried Mr. Bloomfield.

" Do you want to get me disbarred ? " asked Gideon.

" Disbarred ! Come, it can't be as bad as that," said his uncle. " It's a good, honest, Liberal Government that's in, and they would certainly move at my request. Thank God, the days of Tory jobbery are at an end."

" It wouldn't do, Uncle Ned," said Gideon.

" But you're not mad enough," cried Mr. Bloomfield, " to persist in trying to dispose of it yourself ? "

" There is no other path open to me," said Gideon.

" It's not common-sense, and I will not hear of it," cried Mr. Bloomfield. " I command you, positively, Gid, to desist from this criminal interference."

" Very well, then, I hand it over to you," said Gideon, " and you can do what you like with the dead body."

" God forbid ! " ejaculated the president of the Radical Club, " I'll have nothing to do with it."

" Then you must allow me to do the best I can," returned his nephew. " Believe me, I have a distinct talent for this sort of difficulty."

" We might forward it to that pest-house, the Conservative Club," observed Mr. Bloomfield. " It might damage them in the eyes of their constituents ; and it could be profitably worked up in the local journal."

" If you see any political capital in the thing," said Gideon, " you may have it for me."

" No, no, Gid—no, no, I thought *you* might. I will have no hand in the thing. On reflection, it's highly undesirable that either I or Miss Hazeltine should linger here. We might be observed," said the president, looking

up and down the river; "and in my public position the consequences would be painful for the party. And, at any rate, it's dinner-time."

"What?" cried Gideon, plunging for his watch. "And so it is! Great heaven, the piano should have been here hours ago!"

Mr. Bloomfield was clambering back into his boat; but at these words he paused.

"I saw it arrive myself at the station; I hired a carrier man; he had a round to make, but he was to be here by four at the latest," cried the barrister. "No doubt the piano is open, and the body found."

"You must fly at once," cried Mr. Bloomfield, "it's the only manly step."

"But suppose it's all right?" wailed Gideon. "Suppose the piano comes, and I am not here to receive it? I shall have hanged myself by my cowardice. No, Uncle Ned, inquiries must be made in Padwick; I dare not go, of course; but you may—you could hang about the police office, don't you see?"

"No, Gid—no, my dear nephew," said Mr. Bloomfield, with the voice of one on the rack. "I regard you with the most sacred affection; and I thank God I am an Englishman—and all that. But not—not the police, Gid."

"Then you desert me?" said Gideon. "Say it plainly."

"Far from it! far from it!" protested Mr. Bloomfield. "I only propose caution. Common-sense, Gid, should always be an Englishman's guide."

"Will you let me speak?" said Julia. "I think Gideon had better leave this dreadful houseboat, and wait among the willows over there. If the piano comes, then he could step out and take it in; and if the police come, he could slip into our houseboat, and there needn't be any more Jimson at all. He could go to bed, and we could burn his clothes (couldn't we?) in the steam-launch; and then really

it seems as if it would be all right. Mr. Bloomfield is so respectable, you know, and such a leading character, it would be quite impossible even to fancy that he could be mixed up with it."

"This young lady has strong common-sense," said the Squirradical.

"O, I don't think I'm at all a fool," said Julia, with conviction.

"But what if neither of them come?" asked Gideon; "what shall I do then?"

"Why then," said she, "you had better go down to the village after dark; and I can go with you, and then I am sure you could never be suspected; and even if you were, I could tell them it was altogether a mistake."

"I will not permit that—I will not suffer Miss Hazeltine to go," cried Mr. Bloomfield.

"Why?" asked Julia.

Mr. Bloomfield had not the least desire to tell her why, for it was simply a craven fear of being drawn himself into the imbroglio; but with the usual tactics of a man who is ashamed of himself, he took the high hand. "God forbid, my dear Miss Hazeltine, that I should dictate to a lady on the question of propriety——" he began.

"O, is that all?" interrupted Julia. "Then we must go all three."

"Caught!" thought the Squirradical.

CHAPTER XII

POSITIVELY THE LAST APPEARANCE OF THE BROADWOOD GRAND

England is supposed to be unmusical; but without dwelling on the patronage extended to the organ-grinder, without seeking to found any argument on the prevalence of the jew's trump, there is surely one instrument that may be said to be national in the fullest acceptance of the word. The herdboy in the broom, already musical in the days of Father Chaucer, startles (and perhaps pains) the lark with this exiguous pipe; and in the hands of the skilled bricklayer,

> "The thing becomes a trumpet, whence he blows"

(as a general rule) either "The British Grenadiers" or "Cherry Ripe." The latter air is indeed the shibboleth and diploma piece of the penny whistler; I hazard a guess it was originally composed for this instrument. It is singular enough that a man should be able to gain a livelihood, or even to tide over a period of unemployment, by the display of his proficiency upon the penny whistle; still more so, that the professional should almost invariably confine himself to "Cherry Ripe." But indeed, singularities surround the subject, thick like blackberries. Why, for instance, should the pipe be called a penny whistle? I think no one ever bought it for a penny. Why should the alternative name be tin whistle? I am grossly deceived if it be made of tin. Lastly, in what deaf catacomb, in what earless desert, does the beginner pass the excruciating interval of his apprenticeship? We have all heard people

learning the piano, the fiddle, and the cornet ; but the young of the penny whistler (like that of the salmon) is occult from observation ; he is never heard until proficient ; and providence (perhaps alarmed by the works of Mr. Mallock) defends human hearing from his first attempts upon the upper octave.

A really noteworthy thing was taking place in a green lane, not far from Padwick. On the bench of a carrier's cart there sat a tow-headed, lanky, modest-looking youth ; the reins were on his lap ; the whip lay behind him in the interior of the cart ; the horse proceeded without guidance or encouragement ; the carrier (or the carrier's man), rapt into a higher sphere than that of his daily occupations, his looks dwelling on the skies, devoted himself wholly to a brand-new D penny whistle, whence he diffidently endeavoured to elicit that pleasing melody " The Ploughboy." To any observant person who should have chanced to saunter in that lane, the hour would have been thrilling. " Here at last," he would have said, " is the beginner."

The tow-headed youth (whose name was Harker) had just encored himself for the nineteenth time, when he was struck into the extreme of confusion by the discovery that he was not alone.

" There you have it ! " cried a manly voice from the side of the road. " That's as good as I want to hear. Perhaps a leetle oilier in the run," the voice suggested, with meditative gusto. " Give it us again."

Harker glanced, from the depths of his humiliation, at the speaker. He beheld a powerful, sun-brown, clean-shaven fellow, about forty years of age, striding beside the cart with a non-commissioned military bearing, and (as he strode) spinning in the air a cane. The fellow's clothes were very bad, but he looked clean and self-reliant.

" I'm only a beginner," gasped the blushing Harker, " I didn't think anybody could hear me."

" Well, I like that ! " returned the other. " You're a

pretty old beginner. Come, I'll give you a lead myself. Give us a seat here beside you."

The next moment the military gentleman was perched on the cart, pipe in hand. He gave the instrument a knowing rattle on the shaft, mouthed it, appeared to commune for a moment with the muse, and dashed into "The girl I left behind me." He was a great, rather than a fine, performer; he lacked the bird-like richness; he could scarce have extracted all the honey out of "Cherry Ripe"; he did not fear—he even ostentatiously displayed and seemed to revel in—the shrillness of the instrument; but in fire, speed, precision, evenness, and fluency; in linked agility of *jimmy*—a technical expression, by your leave, answering to *warblers* on the bagpipe; and perhaps, above all, in that inspiring side-glance of the eye, with which he followed the effect and (as by a human appeal) eked out the insufficiency of his performance: in these, the fellow stood without a rival. Harker listened: "The girl I left behind me" filled him with despair; "The Soldier's Joy" carried him beyond jealousy into generous enthusiasm.

"Turn about," said the military gentleman, offering the pipe.

"O, not after you!" cried Harker; "you're a professional."

"No," said his companion; "an amatyure like yourself. That's one style of play, yours is the other, and I like it best. But I began when I was a boy, you see, before my taste was formed. When you're my age you'll play that thing like a cornet-à-piston. Give us that air again; how does it go?" and he affected to endeavour to recall "The Ploughboy."

A timid, insane hope sprang in the breast of Harker. Was it possible? Was there something in his playing? It had, indeed, seemed to him at times as if he got a kind of a richness out of it. Was he a genius? Meantime the military gentleman stumbled over the air.

"No," said the unhappy Harker, "that's not quite it. It goes this way—just to show you."

And, taking the pipe between his lips, he sealed his doom. When he had played the air, and then a second time, and a third; when the military gentleman had tried it once more, and once more failed; when it became clear to Harker that he, the blushing débutant, was actually giving a lesson to this full-grown flutist—and the flutist under his care was not very brilliantly progressing—how am I to tell what floods of glory brightened the autumnal countryside; how, unless the reader were an amateur himself, describe the heights of idiotic vanity to which the carrier climbed? One significant fact shall paint the situation: thenceforth it was Harker who played, and the military gentleman listened and approved.

As he listened, however, he did not forget the habit of soldierly precaution, looking both behind and before. He looked behind and computed the value of the carrier's load, divining the contents of the brown-paper parcels and the portly hamper, and briefly setting down the grand piano in the brand-new piano-case as "difficult to get rid of." He looked before, and spied at the corner of the green lane a little country public-house embowered in roses. "I'll have a shy at it," concluded the military gentleman, and roundly proposed a glass.

"Well, I'm not a drinking man," said Harker.

"Look here, now," cut in the other, "I'll tell you who I am: I'm Colour-Sergeant Brand of the Blankth. That'll tell you if I'm a drinking man or not." It might and it might not, thus a Greek chorus would have intervened, and gone on to point out how very far it fell short of telling why the sergeant was tramping a country lane in tatters; or even to argue that he must have pretermitted some while ago his labours for the general defence, and (in the interval) possibly turned his attention to oakum. But there was no Greek chorus present; and the man of war went on to contend that drinking was one thing and a friendly glass another.

In the Blue Lion, which was the name of the country

public-house, Colour-Sergeant Brand introduced his new friend, Mr. Harker, to a number of ingenious mixtures, calculated to prevent the approaches of intoxication. These he explained to be "rekisite" in the service, so that a self-respecting officer should always appear upon parade in a condition honourable to his corps. The most efficacious of these devices was to lace a pint of mild ale with twopenceworth of London gin. I am pleased to hand in this recipe to the discerning reader, who may find it useful even in civil station; for its effect upon Mr. Harker was revolutionary. He must be helped on board his own waggon, where he proceeded to display a spirit entirely given over to mirth and music, alternately hooting with laughter, to which the sergeant hastened to bear chorus, and incoherently tootling on the pipe. The man of war, meantime, unostentatiously possessed himself of the reins. It was plain he had a taste for the secluded beauties of an English landscape; for the cart, although it wandered under his guidance for some time, was never observed to issue on the dusty highway, journeying between hedge and ditch, and for the most part under overhanging boughs. It was plain, besides, he had an eye to the true interests of Mr. Harker; for though the cart drew up more than once at the doors of public-houses, it was only the sergeant who set foot to ground, and, being equipped himself with a quart bottle, once more proceeded on his rural drive.

To give any idea of the complexity of the sergeant's course, a map of that part of Middlesex would be required, and my publisher is averse from the expense. Suffice it, that a little after the night had closed, the cart was brought to a standstill in a woody road; where the sergeant lifted from among the parcels, and tenderly deposited upon the wayside, the inanimate form of Harker.

"If you come-to before daylight," thought the sergeant, "I shall be surprised for one."

From the various pockets of the slumbering carrier he gently collected the sum of seventeen shillings and eight-

pence sterling; and, getting once more into the cart, drove thoughtfully away.

"If I was exactly sure of where I was, it would be a good job," he reflected. "Anyway, here's a corner."

He turned it, and found himself upon the river-side. A little above him the lights of a houseboat shone cheerfully; and already close at hand, so close that it was impossible to avoid their notice, three persons, a lady and two gentlemen, were deliberately drawing near. The sergeant put his trust in the convenient darkness of the night, and drove on to meet them. One of the gentlemen, who was of a portly figure, walked in the midst of the fairway, and presently held up a staff by way of signal.

"My man, have you seen anything of a carrier's cart?" he cried.

Dark as it was, it seemed to the sergeant as though the slimmer of the two gentlemen had made a motion to prevent the other speaking, and (finding himself too late) had skipped aside with some alacrity. At another season, Sergeant Brand would have paid more attention to the fact; but he was then immersed in the perils of his own predicament.

"A carrier's cart?" said he, with a perceptible uncertainty of voice. "No, sir."

"Ah!" said the portly gentleman, and stood aside to let the sergeant pass. The lady appeared to bend forward and study the cart with every mark of sharpened curiosity, the slimmer gentleman still keeping in the rear.

"I wonder what the devil they would be at," thought Sergeant Brand; and, looking fearfully back, he saw the trio standing together in the midst of the way, like folk consulting. The bravest of military heroes are not always equal to themselves as to their reputation; and fear, on some singular provocation, will find a lodgment in the most unfamiliar bosom. The word "detective" might have been heard to gurgle in the sergeant's throat; and vigorously applying the whip, he fled up the river-side road to Great

Haverham, at the gallop of the carrier's horse. The lights of the houseboat flashed upon the flying waggon as it passed; the beat of hoofs and the rattle of the vehicle gradually coalesced and died away; and presently, to the trio on the river-side, silence had redescended.

"It's the most extraordinary thing," cried the slimmer of the two gentlemen, "but that's the cart!"

"And I know I saw a piano," said the girl.

"O, it's the cart, certainly; and the extraordinary thing is, it's not the man," added the first.

"It must be the man, Gid, it must be," said the portly one.

"Well, then, why is he running away?" asked Gideon.

"His horse bolted, I suppose," said the Squirradical.

"Nonsense! I heard the whip going like a flail," said Gideon. "It simply defies the human reason."

"I'll tell you," broke in the girl, "he came round that corner. Suppose we went and—what do you call it in books?—followed his trail? There may be a house there, or somebody who saw him, or something."

"Well, suppose we did, for the fun of the thing," said Gideon.

The fun of the thing (it would appear) consisted in the extremely close juxtaposition of himself and Miss Hazeltine. To Uncle Ned, who was excluded from these simple pleasures, the excursion appeared hopeless from the first; and when a fresh perspective of darkness opened up, dimly contained between park palings on the one side and a hedge and ditch upon the other, the whole without the smallest signal of human habitation, the Squirradical drew up.

"This is a wild-goose chase," said he.

With the cessation of the footfalls, another sound smote upon their ears.

"O, what's that?" cried Julia.

"I can't think," said Gideon.

The Squirradical had his stick presented like a sword. "Gid," he began, "Gid, I——"

" O Mr. Forsyth ! " cried the girl. " O don't go forward, you don't know what it might be—it might be something perfectly horrid."

" It may be the devil itself," said Gideon, disengaging himself, " but I am going to see it."

" Don't be rash, Gid," cried his uncle.

The barrister drew near to the sound, which was certainly of a portentous character. In quality it appeared to blend the strains of the cow, the fog-horn, and the mosquito ; and the startling manner of its enunciation added incalculably to its terrors. A dark object, not unlike the human form divine, appeared on the brink of the ditch.

" It's a man," said Gideon, " it's only a man ; he seems to be asleep and snoring.—Hullo," he added, a moment after, " there must be something wrong with him, he won't waken."

Gideon produced his vestas, struck one, and by its light recognised the tow head of Harker.

" This is the man," said he, " as drunk as Belial. I see the whole story " ; and to his two companions, who had now ventured to rejoin him, he set forth a theory of the divorce between the carrier and his cart, which was not unlike the truth.

" Drunken brute ! " said Uncle Ned, " let's get him to a pump and give him what he deserves."

" Not at all ! " said Gideon. " It is highly undesirable he should see us together ; and really, do you know, I am very much obliged to him, for this is about the luckiest thing that could have possibly occurred. It seems to me—Uncle Ned, I declare to heaven it seems to me—I'm clear of it ! "

" Clear of what ? " asked the Squirradical.

" The whole affair ! " cried Gideon. " That man has been ass enough to steal the cart and the dead body ; what he hopes to do with it I neither know nor care. My hands are free, Jimson ceases ; down with Jimson. Shake hands with me, Uncle Ned—Julia, darling girl, Julia, I——"

" Gideon, Gideon ! " said his uncle.

" O, it's all right, uncle, when we're going to be married so soon," said Gideon. " You know you said so yourself in the houseboat."

" Did I ? " said Uncle Ned ; " I am certain I said no such thing."

" Appeal to him, tell him he did, get on his soft side," cried Gideon. " He's a real brick if you get on his soft side."

" Dear Mr. Bloomfield," said Julia, " I know Gideon will be such a very good boy, and he has promised me to do such a lot of law, and I will see that he does too. And you know it is so very steadying to young men, everybody admits that ; though, of course, I know I have no money, Mr. Bloomfield," she added.

" My dear young lady, as this rapscallion told you to-day on the boat, Uncle Ned has plenty," said the Squirradical, " and I can never forget that you have been shamefully defrauded. So as there's nobody looking, you had better give your Uncle Ned a kiss. There, you rogue," resumed Mr. Bloomfield, when the ceremony had been daintily performed, " this very pretty young lady is yours, and a vast deal more than you deserve. But now, let us get back to the houseboat, get up steam on the launch, and away back to town."

" That's the thing ! " cried Gideon ; " and to-morrow there will be no houseboat, and no Jimson, and no carrier's cart, and no piano ; and when Harker awakes on the ditch-side, he may tell himself the whole affair has been a dream."

" Aha ! " said Uncle Ned, " but there's another man who will have a different awakening. That fellow in the cart will find he has been too clever by half."

" Uncle Ned and Julia," said Gideon, " I am as happy as the King of Tartary, my heart is like a threepenny-bit, my heels are like feathers ; I am out of all my troubles, Julia's hand is in mine. Is this a time for anything but

handsome sentiments? Why, there's not room in me for anything that's not angelic! And when I think of that poor unhappy devil in the cart, I stand here in the night and cry with a single heart—God help him!"

"Amen," said Uncle Ned.

CHAPTER XIII

THE TRIBULATIONS OF MORRIS: PART THE SECOND

In a really polite age of literature I would have scorned to cast my eye again on the contortions of Morris. But the study is in the spirit of the day; it presents, besides, features of a high, almost a repulsive, morality; and if it should prove the means of preventing any respectable and inexperienced gentleman from plunging light-heartedly into crime, even political crime, this work will not have been penned in vain.

He rose on the morrow of his night with Michael, rose from the leaden slumber of distress, to find his hand tremulous, his eyes closed with rheum, his throat parched, and his digestion obviously paralysed. "Lord knows it's not from eating!" Morris thought; and as he dressed he reconsidered his position under several heads. Nothing will so well depict the troubled seas in which he was now voyaging as a review of these various anxieties. I have thrown them (for the reader's convenience) into a certain order; but in the mind of one poor human equal they whirled together like the dust of hurricanes. With the same obliging preoccupation, I have put a name to each of his distresses; and it will be observed with pity that every individual item would have graced and commended the cover of a railway novel.

Anxiety the First: *Where is the Body? or, The Mystery of Bent Pitman.* It was now manifestly plain that Bent Pitman (as was to be looked for from his ominous appellation) belonged to the darker order of the criminal class. An honest man would not have cashed the bill; a humane

man would not have accepted in silence the tragic contents of the water-butt ; a man, who was not already up to the hilts in gore, would have lacked the means of secretly disposing them. This process of reasoning left a horrid image of the monster, Pitman. Doubtless he had long ago disposed of the body—dropping it through a trap-door in his back kitchen, Morris supposed, with some hazy recollection of a picture in a penny dreadful ; and doubtless the man now lived in wanton splendour on the proceeds of the bill. So far, all was peace. But with the profligate habits of a man like Bent Pitman (who was no doubt a hunchback in the bargain), eight hundred pounds could be easily melted in a week. When they were gone, what would he be likely to do next ? A hell-like voice in Morris's own bosom gave the answer : " Blackmail me."

Anxiety the Second : *The Fraud of the Tontine ; or, Is my Uncle dead ?* This, on which all Morris's hopes depended, was yet a question. He had tried to bully Teena ; he had tried to bribe her ; and nothing came of it. He had his moral conviction still ; but you cannot blackmail a sharp lawyer on a moral conviction. And besides, since his interview with Michael, the idea wore a less attractive countenance. Was Michael the man to be blackmailed ? and was Morris the man to do it ? Grave considerations. " It's not that I'm afraid of him," Morris so far condescended to reassure himself ; " but I must be very certain of my ground, and the deuce of it is, I see no way. How unlike is life to novels ! I wouldn't have even begun this business in a novel, but what I'd have met a dark, slouching fellow in the Oxford Road, who'd have become my accomplice, and known all about how to do it, and probably broken into Michael's house at night and found nothing but a waxwork image ; and then blackmailed or murdered me. But here, in real life, I might walk the streets till I dropped dead, and none of the criminal classes would look near me. Though, to be sure, there is always Pitman," he added thoughtfully.

Anxiety the Third: *The Cottage at Browndean; or, The Underpaid Accomplice.* For he had an accomplice, and that accomplice was blooming unseen in a damp cottage in Hampshire with empty pockets. What could be done about that? He really ought to have sent him something; if it was only a post-office order for five bob, enough to prove that he was kept in mind, enough to keep him in hope, beer, and tobacco. "But what would you have?" thought Morris; and ruefully poured into his hand a half-crown, a florin, and eightpence in small change. For a man in Morris's position, at war with all society, and conducting, with the hand of inexperience, a widely ramified intrigue, the sum was already a derision. John would have to be doing; no mistake of that. "But then," asked the hell-like voice, "how long is John likely to stand it?"

Anxiety the Fourth: *The Leather Business; or, The Shutters at Last: a Tale of the City.* On this head Morris had no news. He had not yet dared to visit the family concern; yet he knew he must delay no longer, and if anything had been wanted to sharpen this conviction, Michael's references of the night before rang ambiguously in his ear. Well and good. To visit the city might be indispensable; but what was he to do when he was there? He had no right to sign in his own name; and, with all the will in the world, he seemed to lack the art of signing with his uncle's. Under these circumstances, Morris could do nothing to procrastinate the crash; and, when it came, when prying eyes began to be applied to every joint of his behaviour, two questions could not fail to be addressed, sooner or later, to a speechless and perspiring insolvent. Where is Mr. Joseph Finsbury? and how about your visit to the bank? Questions, how easy to put!—ye gods, how impossible to answer! The man to whom they should be addressed went certainly to gaol, and—eh! what was this?—possibly to the gallows. Morris was trying to shave when this idea struck him, and he laid the razor down. Here (in

Michael's words) was the total disappearance of a valuable uncle; here was a time of inexplicable conduct on the part of a nephew who had been in bad blood with the old man any time these seven years; what a chance for a judicial blunder! "But no," thought Morris, "they cannot, they dare not, make it murder. Not that. But honestly, and speaking as a man to a man, I don't see any other crime in the calendar (except arson) that I don't seem somehow to have committed. And yet I'm a perfectly respectable man, and wished nothing but my due. Law is a pretty business."

With this conclusion firmly seated in his mind, Morris Finsbury descended to the hall of the house in John Street, still half-shaven. There was a letter in the box; he knew the handwriting: John at last!

"Well, I think I might have been spared this," he said bitterly, and tore it open.

"Dear Morris," it ran, "what the dickens do you mean by it? I'm in an awful hole down here; I have to go on tick, and the parties on the spot don't cotton to the idea; they couldn't, because it is so plain I'm in a stait of Destitution. I've got no bed-clothes, think of that, I must have coins, the hole thing's a Mockry, I wont stand it, nobody would. I would have come away before, only I have no money for the railway fare. Don't be a lunatic, Morris, you don't seem to understand my dredful situation. I have to get the stamp on tick. A fact.—Ever your affte. Brother,

"J. Finsbury."

"Can't even spell!" Morris reflected, as he crammed the letter in his pocket, and left the house. "What can I do for him? I have to go to the expense of a barber, I'm so shattered! How can I send anybody coins? It's hard lines, I daresay; but does he think I'm living on hot muffins? One comfort," was his grim reflection, "he can't cut and run—he's got to stay; he's as helpless as the dead." And then he broke forth again: "Complains, does he? and he's never even heard of Bent Pitman! If he had what I have on my mind, he might complain with a good grace."

But these were not honest arguments, or not wholly honest; there was a struggle in the mind of Morris; he could not disguise from himself that his brother John was miserably situated at Browndean, without news, without money, without bed-clothes, without society or any entertainment; and by the time he had been shaved and picked a hasty breakfast at a coffee tavern, Morris had arrived at a compromise.

"Poor Johnny," he said to himself, "he's in an awful box! I can't send him coins, but I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll send him the *Pink Un*—it'll cheer John up; and besides, it'll do his credit good getting anything by post."

Accordingly, on his way to the leather business, whither he proceeded (according to his thrifty habit) on foot, Morris purchased and despatched a single copy of that enlivening periodical, to which (in a sudden pang of remorse) he added at random the *Athenæum*, the *Revivalist*, and the *Penny Pictorial Weekly*. So there was John set up with literature, and Morris had laid balm upon his conscience.

As if to reward him, he was received in his place of business with good news. Orders were pouring in; there was a run on some of the back stock, and the figure had gone up. Even the manager appeared elated. As for Morris, who had almost forgotten the meaning of good news, he longed to sob like a little child; he could have caught the manager (a pallid man with startled eyebrows) to his bosom; he could have found it in his generosity to give a cheque (for a small sum) to every clerk in the counting-house. As he sat and opened his letters a chorus of airy vocalists sang in his brain, to most exquisite music, "This whole concern may be profitable yet, profitable yet, profitable yet."

To him, in this sunny moment of relief, enter a Mr. Rodgerson, a creditor, but not one who was expected to be pressing, for his connection with the firm was old and regular.

"O, Finsbury," said he, not without embarrassment,

" it's of course only fair to let you know—the fact is, money is a trifle tight—I have some paper out—for that matter, every one's complaining—and in short——"

" It has never been our habit, Rodgerson," said Morris, turning pale. " But give me time to turn round, and I'll see what I can do ; I daresay we can let you have something to account."

" Well, that's just where it is," replied Rodgerson. " I was tempted ; I've let the credit out of my hands."

" Out of your hands ? " repeated Morris. " That's playing rather fast and loose with us, Mr. Rodgerson."

" Well, I got cent. for cent. for it," said the other, " on the nail, in a certified cheque."

" Cent. for cent. ! " cried Morris. " Why, that's something like thirty per cent. bonus ; a singular thing ! Who's the party ? "

" Don't know the man," was the reply. " Name of Moss."

" A Jew," Morris reflected, when his visitor was gone. And what could a Jew want with a claim of—he verified the amount in the books—a claim of three five eight, nineteen, ten, against the house of Finsbury ? And why should he pay cent. for cent. ? The figure proved the loyalty of Rodgerson—even Morris admitted that. But it proved unfortunately something else—the eagerness of Moss. The claim must have been wanted instantly, for that day, for that morning even. Why ? The mystery of Moss promised to be a fit pendant to the mystery of Pitman. " And just when all was looking well too ! " cried Morris, smiting his hand upon the desk. And almost at the same moment Mr. Moss was announced.

Mr. Moss was a radiant Hebrew, brutally handsome, and offensively polite. He was acting, it appeared, for a third party ; he understood nothing of the circumstances ; his client desired to have his position regularised ; but he would accept an antedated cheque—antedated by two months, if Mr. Finsbury chose.

"But I don't understand this," said Morris. "What made you pay cent. per cent. for it to-day?"

Mr. Moss had no idea; only his orders.

"The whole thing is thoroughly irregular," said Morris. "It is not the custom of the trade to settle at this time of the year. What are your instructions if I refuse?"

"I am to see Mr. Joseph Finsbury, the head of the firm," said Mr. Moss. "I was directed to insist on that; it was implied you had no status here—the expressions are not mine."

"You cannot see Mr. Joseph; he is unwell," said Morris.

"In that case I was to place the matter in the hands of a lawyer. Let me see," said Mr. Moss, opening a pocket-book with, perhaps, suspicious care, at the right place—"Yes—of Mr. Michael Finsbury. A relation, perhaps? In that case, I presume, the matter will be pleasantly arranged."

To pass into the hands of Michael was too much for Morris. He struck his colours. A cheque at two months was nothing, after all. In two months he would probably be dead, or in a gaol at any rate. He bade the manager give Mr. Moss a chair and the paper. "I'm going over to get a cheque signed by Mr. Finsbury," said he, "who is lying ill at John Street."

A cab there and a cab back; here were inroads on his wretched capital! He counted the cost; when he was done with Mr. Moss he would be left with twelvepence-halfpenny in the world. What was even worse, he had now been forced to bring his uncle up to Bloomsbury. "No use for poor Johnny in Hampshire now," he reflected. "And how the farce is to be kept up completely passes me. At Browndean it was just possible; in Bloomsbury it seems beyond human ingenuity—though I suppose it's what Michael does. But then he has accomplices—that Scotsman and the whole gang. Ah, if I had accomplices!"

Necessity is the mother of the arts. Under a spur so

immediate, Morris surprised himself by the neatness and despatch of his new forgery, and within three-fourths of an hour had handed it to Mr. Moss.

"That is very satisfactory," observed that gentleman, rising. "I was to tell you it will not be presented, but you had better take care."

The room swam round Morris. "What—what's that!" he cried, grasping the table. He was miserably conscious the next moment of his shrill tongue and ashen face. "What do you mean—it will not be presented? Why am I to take care? What is all this mummery?"

"I have no idea, Mr. Finsbury," replied the smiling Hebrew. "It was a message I was to deliver. The expressions were put into my mouth."

"What is your client's name?" asked Morris.

"That is a secret for the moment," answered Mr. Moss.

Morris bent toward him. "It's not the bank?" he asked hoarsely.

"I have no authority to say more, Mr. Finsbury," returned Mr. Moss. "I will wish you a good morning, if you please."

"Wish me a good morning!" thought Morris; and the next moment, seizing his hat, he fled from his place of business like a madman. Three streets away he stopped and groaned. "Lord! I should have borrowed from the manager!" he cried. "But it's too late now; it would look dicky to go back; I'm penniless—simply penniless—like the unemployed."

He went home and sat in the dismantled dining-room with his head in his hands. Newton never thought harder than this victim of circumstances, and yet no clearness came. "It may be a defect in my intelligence," he cried, rising to his feet, "but I cannot see that I am fairly used. The bad luck I've had is a thing to write to the *Times* about; it's enough to breed a revolution. And the plain English of the whole thing is that I must have money at once. I'm done with all morality now; I'm long past that stage;

money I must have, and the only chance I see is Bent Pitman. Bent Pitman is a criminal, and therefore his position's weak. He must have some of that eight hundred left ; if he has I'll force him to go shares ; and even if he hasn't, I'll tell him the tontine affair, and with a desperate man like Pitman at my back, it'll be strange if I don't succeed."

Well and good. But how to lay hands upon Bent Pitman, except by advertisement, was not so clear. And even so, in what terms to ask a meeting ? on what grounds ? and where ? Not at John Street, for it would never do to let a man like Bent Pitman know your real address ; nor yet at Pitman's house, some dreadful place in Holloway, with a trap-door in the back kitchen ; a house which you might enter in a light summer overcoat and varnished boots, to come forth again piecemeal in a market-basket. That was the drawback of a really efficient accomplice, Morris felt, not without a shudder. " I never dreamed I should come to actually covet such society," he thought. And then a brilliant idea struck him. Waterloo Station, a public place, yet at certain hours of the day a solitary ; a place, besides, the very name of which must knock upon the heart of Pitman, and at once suggest a knowledge of the latest of his guilty secrets. Morris took a piece of paper and sketched his advertisement.

" William Bent Pitman, if this should meet the eye of, he will hear of something to his advantage on the far end of the main line departure platform, Waterloo Station, 2 to 4 p.m., Sunday next."

Morris reperused this literary trifle with approbation. " Terse," he reflected. " Something to his advantage is not strictly true ; but it's taking and original, and a man is not on oath in an advertisement. All that I require now is the ready cash for my own meals and for the advertisement, and—no, I can't lavish money upon John, but I'll give him some more papers. How to raise the wind ? "

He approached his cabinet of signets, and the collector suddenly revolted in his blood. "I will not!" he cried; "nothing shall induce me to massacre my collection—rather theft!" And dashing upstairs to the drawing-room, he helped himself to a few of his uncle's curiosities: a pair of Turkish babooshes, a Smyrna fan, a water-cooler, a musket guaranteed to have been seized from an Ephesian bandit, and a pocketful of curious but incomplete sea-shells.

CHAPTER XIV

WILLIAM BENT PITMAN HEARS OF SOMETHING TO HIS ADVANTAGE

On the morning of Sunday, William Dent Pitman rose at his usual hour, although with something more than the usual reluctance. The day before (it should be explained) an addition had been made to his family in the person of a lodger. Michael Finsbury had acted sponsor in the business, and guaranteed the weekly bill; on the other hand, no doubt with a spice of his prevailing jocularity, he had drawn a depressing portrait of the lodger's character. Mr. Pitman had been led to understand his guest was not good company; he had approached the gentleman with fear, and had rejoiced to find himself the entertainer of an angel. At tea he had been vastly pleased; till hard on one in the morning he had sat entranced by eloquence and progressively fortified with information in the studio; and now, as he reviewed over his toilet the harmless pleasures of the evening, the future smiled upon him with revived attractions. "Mr. Finsbury is indeed an acquisition," he remarked to himself; and as he entered the little parlour, where the table was already laid for breakfast, the cordiality of his greeting would have befitted an acquaintanceship already old.

"I am delighted to see you, sir"—these were his expressions—"and I trust you have slept well."

"Accustomed as I have been for so long to a life of almost perpetual change," replied the guest, "the disturbance so often complained of by the more sedentary, as attending their first night in (what is called) a new bed, is a complaint from which I am entirely free."

"I am delighted to hear it," said the drawing-master warmly. "But I see I have interrupted you over the paper."

"The Sunday paper is one of the features of the age," said Mr. Finsbury. "In America, I am told, it supersedes all other literature, the bone and sinew of the nation finding their requirements catered for; hundreds of columns will be occupied with interesting details of the world's doings, such as water-spouts, elopements, conflagrations, and public entertainments; there is a corner for politics, ladies' work, chess, religion, and even literature; and a few spicy editorials serve to direct the course of public thought. It is difficult to estimate the part played by such enormous and miscellaneous repositories in the education of the people. But this (though interesting in itself) partakes of the nature of a digression; and what I was about to ask you was this: Are you yourself a student of the daily press?"

"There is not much in the papers to interest an artist," returned Pitman.

"In that case," resumed Joseph, "an advertisement which has appeared the last two days in various journals, and reappears this morning, may possibly have failed to catch your eye. The name, with a trifling variation, bears a strong resemblance to your own. Ah, here it is. If you please, I will read it to you:—

"'WILLIAM BENT PITMAN, if this should meet the eye of, he will hear of SOMETHING TO HIS ADVANTAGE at the far end of the main line departure platform, Waterloo Station, 2 to 4 P.M. to-day.'"

"Is that in print?" cried Pitman. "Let me see it! Bent? It must be Dent! *Something to my advantage?* Mr. Finsbury, excuse me offering a word of caution; I am aware how strangely this must sound in your ears, but there are domestic reasons why this little circumstance might perhaps be better kept between ourselves. Mrs. Pitman—my dear sir, I assure you there is nothing

dishonourable in my secrecy; the reasons are domestic, merely domestic; and I may set your conscience at rest when I assure you all the circumstances are known to our common friend, your excellent nephew, Mr. Michael, who has not withdrawn from me his esteem."

"A word is enough, Mr. Pitman," said Joseph, with one of his Oriental reverences.

Half an hour later, the drawing-master found Michael in bed and reading a book, the picture of good-humour and repose.

"Hillo, Pitman," he said, laying down his book, "what brings you here at this inclement hour? Ought to be in church, my boy!"

"I have little thought of church to-day, Mr. Finsbury," said the drawing-master. "I am on the brink of something new, sir." And he presented the advertisement.

"Why, what is this?" cried Michael, sitting suddenly up. He studied it for half a minute with a frown. "Pitman, I don't care about this document a particle," said he.

"It will have to be attended to, however," said Pitman.

"I thought you'd had enough of Waterloo," returned the lawyer. "Have you started a morbid craving? You've never been yourself anyway since you lost that beard. I believe now it was where you kept your senses."

"Mr. Finsbury," said the drawing-master, "I have tried to reason this matter out, and, with your permission, I should like to lay before you the results."

"Fire away," said Michael; "but please, Pitman, remember it's Sunday, and let's have no bad language."

"There are three views open to us," began Pitman. "First this may be connected with the barrel; second, it may be connected with Mr. Semitopolis's statue; and third, it may be from my wife's brother, who went to Australia. In the first case, which is of course possible, I confess the matter would be best allowed to drop."

"The court is with you there, Brother Pitman," said Michael.

"In the second," continued the other, "it is plainly my duty to leave no stone unturned for the recovery of the lost antique."

"My dear fellow, Semitopolis has come down like a trump; he has pocketed the loss and left you the profit. What more would you have?" inquired the lawyer.

"I conceive, sir, under correction, that Mr. Semitopolis's generosity binds me to even greater exertion," said the drawing-master. "The whole business was unfortunate; it was—I need not disguise it from you—it was illegal from the first: the more reason that I should try to behave like a gentleman," concluded Pitman, flushing.

"I have nothing to say to that," returned the lawyer. "I have sometimes thought I should like to try to behave like a gentleman myself; only it's such a one-sided business, with the world and the legal profession as they are."

"Then, in the third," resumed the drawing-master, "if it's Uncle Tim, of course, our fortune's made."

"It's not Uncle Tim, though," said the lawyer.

"Have you observed that very remarkable expression: *Something to his advantage?*" inquired Pitman shrewdly.

"You innocent mutton," said Michael, "it's the seediest commonplace in the English language, and only proves the advertiser is an ass. Let me demolish your house of cards for you at once. Would Uncle Tim make that blunder in your name?—in itself, the blunder is delicious, a huge improvement on the gross reality, and I mean to adopt it in the future; but is it like Uncle Tim?"

"No, it's not like him," Pitman admitted. "But his mind may have become unhinged at Ballarat."

"If you come to that, Pitman," said Michael, "the advertiser *may* be Queen Victoria, fired with the desire to make a duke of you. I put it to yourself if that's probable; and yet it's not against the laws of nature. But we sit here to consider probabilities; and with your genteel permission, I eliminate her Majesty and Uncle Tim on

the threshold. To proceed, we have your second idea, that this has some connection with the statue. Possible; but in that case who is the advertiser? Not Ricardi, for he knows your address; not the person who got the box, for he doesn't know your name. The vanman, I hear you suggest, in a lucid interval. He might have got your name, and got it incorrectly, at the station; and he might have failed to get your address. I grant the vanman. But a question: Do you really wish to meet the vanman?"

"Why should I not?" asked Pitman.

"If he wants to meet you," replied Michael, "observe this: it is because he has found his address-book, has been to the house that got the statue, and—mark my words!—is moving at the instigation of the murderer."

"I should be very sorry to think so," said Pitman; "but I still consider it my duty to Mr. Semitopolis . . ."

"Pitman," interrupted Michael, "this will not do. Don't seek to impose on your legal adviser; don't try to pass yourself off for the Duke of Wellington, for that is not your line. Come, I wager a dinner I can read your thoughts. You still believe it's Uncle Tim."

"Mr. Finsbury," said the drawing-master, colouring, "you are not a man in narrow circumstances, and you have no family. Guendolen is growing up, a very promising girl—she was confirmed this year; and I think you will be able to enter into my feelings as a parent when I tell you she is quite ignorant of dancing. The boys are at the board school, which is all very well in its way; at least, I am the last man in the world to criticise the institutions of my native land. But I had fondly hoped that Harold might become a professional musician; and little Otho shows a quite remarkable vocation for the Church. I am not exactly an ambitious man . . ."

"Well, well," interrupted Michael. "Be explicit; you think it's Uncle Tim?"

"It might be Uncle Tim," insisted Pitman, "and if it were, and I neglected the occasion, how could I ever look

my children in the face? I do not refer to Mrs. Pitman . . ."

"No, you never do," said Michael.

". . . but in the case of her own brother returning from Ballarat . . ." continued Pitman.

". . . with his mind unhinged," put in the lawyer.

". . . returning from Ballarat with a large fortune, her impatience may be more easily imagined than described," concluded Pitman.

"All right," said Michael, "be it so. And what do you propose to do?"

"I am going to Waterloo," said Pitman, "in disguise."

"All by your little self?" inquired the lawyer. "Well, I hope you think it safe. Mind and send me word from the police cells."

"O, Mr. Finsbury, I had ventured to hope—perhaps you might be induced to—to make one of us," faltered Pitman.

"Disguise myself on Sunday?" cried Michael. "How little you understand my principles!"

"Mr. Finsbury, I have no means of showing you my gratitude; but let me ask you one question," said Pitman. "If I were a very rich client, would you not take the risk?"

"Diamond, Diamond, you know not what you do!" cried Michael. "Why, man, do you suppose I make a practice of cutting about London with my clients in disguise? Do you suppose money would induce me to touch this business with a stick? I give you my word of honour, it would not. But I own I have a real curiosity to see how you conduct this interview—that tempts me; it tempts me, Pitman, more than gold—it should be exquisitely rich." And suddenly Michael laughed. "Well, Pitman," said he, "have all the truck ready in the studio. I'll go."

About twenty minutes after two, on this eventful day, the vast and gloomy shed of Waterloo lay, like the temple

of a dead religion, silent and deserted. Here and there at one of the platforms, a train lay becalmed ; here and there a wandering footfall echoed ; the cab-horses outside stamped with startling reverberations on the stones ; or from the neighbouring wilderness of railway an engine snorted forth a whistle. The main-line departure platform slumbered like the rest ; the booking-hutches closed ; the backs of Mr. Haggard's novels, with which upon a week-day the bookstall shines emblazoned, discreetly hidden behind dingy shutters ; the rare officials, undisguisedly somnambulant ; and the customary loiterers, even to the middle-aged woman with the ulster and the handbag, fled to more congenial scenes. As in the inmost dells of some small tropic island the throbbing of the ocean lingers, so here a faint pervading hum and trepidation told in every corner of surrounding London.

At the hour already named, persons acquainted with John Dickson, of Ballarat, and Ezra Thomas, of the United States of America, would have been cheered to behold them enter through the booking-office.

" What names are we to take ? " inquired the latter, anxiously adjusting the window-glass spectacles which he had been suffered on this occasion to assume.

" There's no choice for you, my boy," returned Michael. " Bent Pitman or nothing. As for me, I think I look as if I might be called Appleby ; something agreeably old-world about Appleby—breathes of Devonshire cider. Talking of which, suppose you wet your whistle ? the interview is likely to be trying."

" I think I'll wait till afterwards," returned Pitman ; " on the whole, I think I'll wait till the thing's over. I don't know if it strikes you as it does me ; but the place seems deserted and silent, Mr. Finsbury, and filled with very singular echoes."

" Kind of Jack-in-the-box feeling ? " inquired Michael, " as if all these empty trains might be filled with policemen waiting for a signal ? and Sir Charles Warren perched

among the girders with a silver whistle to his lips? It's guilt, Pitman."

In this uneasy frame of mind they walked nearly the whole length of the departure platform, and at the western extremity became aware of a slender figure standing back against a pillar. The figure was plainly sunk into a deep abstraction; he was not aware of their approach, but gazed far abroad over the sunlit station. Michael stopped.

"Holloa!" said he, "can that be your advertiser? If so, I'm done with it." And then, on second thoughts: "Not so, either," he resumed more cheerfully. "Here, turn your back a moment. So. Give me the specs."

"But you agreed I was to have them," protested Pitman.

"Ah, but that man knows me," said Michael.

"Does he? what's his name?" cried Pitman.

"O, he took me into his confidence," returned the lawyer. "But I may say one thing: if he's your advertiser (and he may be, for he seems to have been seized with criminal lunacy) you can go ahead with a clear conscience, for I hold him in the hollow of my hand."

The change effected, and Pitman comforted with this good news, the pair drew near to Morris.

"Are you looking for Mr. William Bent Pitman?" inquired the drawing-master. "I am he."

Morris raised his head. He saw before him, in the speaker, a person of almost indescribable insignificance, in white spats and a shirt cut indecently low. A little behind, a second and more burly figure offered little to criticism, except ulster, whiskers, spectacles, and deer-stalker hat. Since he had decided to call up devils from the underworld of London, Morris had pondered deeply on the probabilities of their appearance. His first emotion, like that of Charoba when she beheld the sea, was one of disappointment; his second did more justice to the case. Never before had he seen a couple dressed like these; he had struck a new stratum.

"I must speak with you alone," said he.

"You need not mind Mr. Appleby," returned Pitman. "He knows all."

"All? Do you know what I am here to speak of?" inquired Morris. "The barrel."

Pitman turned pale, but it was with manly indignation. "You are the man!" he cried. "You very wicked person."

"Am I to speak before him?" asked Morris, disregarding these severe expressions.

"He has been present throughout," said Pitman. "He opened the barrel; your guilty secret is already known to him, as well as to your Maker and myself."

"Well, then," said Morris, "what have you done with the money?"

"I know nothing about any money," said Pitman.

"You needn't try that on," said Morris. "I have tracked you down; you came to the station sacrilegiously disguised as a clergyman, procured my barrel, opened it, rifled the body, and cashed the bill. I have been to the bank, I tell you! I have followed you step by step, and your denials are childish and absurd."

"Come, come, Morris, keep your temper," said Mr. Appleby.

"Michael!" cried Morris, "Michael here too!"

"Here too," echoed the lawyer; "here and everywhere, my good fellow; every step you take is counted; trained detectives follow you like your shadow; they report to me every three-quarters of an hour; no expense is spared."

Morris's face took on a hue of dirty grey. "Well, I don't care; I have the less reserve to keep," he cried. "That man cashed my bill; it's a theft, and I want the money back."

"Do you think I would lie to you, Morris?" asked Michael.

"I don't know," said his cousin. "I want my money."

" It was I alone who touched the body," began Michael.

" You ? Michael ! " cried Morris, starting back. " Then why haven't you declared the death ? "

" What the devil do you mean ? " asked Michael.

" Am I mad ? or are you ? " cried Morris.

" I think it must be Pitman," said Michael.

The three men stared at each other, wild-eyed.

" This is dreadful," said Morris, " dreadful. I do not understand one word that is addressed to me."

" I give you my word of honour, no more do I," said Michael.

" And in God's name, why whiskers ? " cried Morris, pointing in a ghastly manner at his cousin. " Does my brain reel ? How whiskers ? "

" O, that's a matter of detail," said Michael.

There was another silence, during which Morris appeared to himself to be shot in a trapeze as high as St. Paul's, and as low as Baker Street Station.

" Let us recapitulate," said Michael, " unless it's really a dream, in which case I wish Teena would call me for breakfast. My friend Pitman, here, received a barrel which, it now appears, was meant for you. The barrel contained the body of a man. How or why you killed him . . ."

" I never laid a hand on him," protested Morris. " This is what I have dreaded all along. But think, Michael ! I'm not that kind of man ; with all my faults, I wouldn't touch a hair of anybody's head, and it was all dead loss to me. He got killed in that vile accident."

Suddenly Michael was seized by mirth so prolonged and excessive that his companions supposed beyond a doubt his reason had deserted him. Again and again he struggled to compose himself, and again and again laughter overwhelmed him like a tide. In all this maddening interview there had been no more spectral feature than this of Michael's merriment ; and Pitman and Morris, drawn together by the common fear, exchanged glances of anxiety.

"Morris," gasped the lawyer, when he was at last able to articulate, "hold on, I see it all now. I can make it clear in one word. Here's the key: *I never guessed it was Uncle Joseph till this moment.*"

This remark produced an instant lightening of the tension for Morris. For Pitman it quenched the last ray of hope and daylight. Uncle Joseph, whom he had left an hour ago in Norfolk Street, pasting newspaper cuttings? —it?—the dead body?—then who was he, Pitman? and was this Waterloo Station or Colney Hatch?

"To be sure!" cried Morris; "it was badly smashed, I know. How stupid not to think of that! Why, then, all's clear; and, my dear Michael, I'll tell you what—we're saved, both saved. You get the tontine—I don't grudge it you the least—and I get the leather business, which is really beginning to look up. Declare the death at once, don't mind me in the smallest, don't consider me; declare the death, and we're all right."

"Ah, but I can't declare it," said Michael.

"Why not?" cried Morris.

"I can't produce the corpus, Morris. I've lost it," said the lawyer.

"Stop a bit," ejaculated the leather merchant. "How is this? It's not possible. I lost it."

"Well, I've lost it too, my son," said Michael, with extreme serenity. "Not recognising it, you see, and suspecting something irregular in its origin, I got rid of—what shall we say?—got rid of the proceeds at once."

"You got rid of the body? What made you do that?" wailed Morris. "But you can get it again? You know where it is?"

"I wish I did, Morris, and you may believe me there, for it would be a small sum in my pocket; but the fact is, I don't," said Michael.

"Good Lord," said Morris, addressing heaven and earth, "good Lord, I've lost the leather business!"

Michael was once more shaken with laughter.

"Why do you laugh, you fool?" cried his cousin, "you lose more than I. You've bungled it worse than even I did. If you had a spark of feeling, you would be shaking in your boots with vexation. But I'll tell you one thing—I'll have that eight hundred pound—I'll have that and go to Swan River—that's mine, anyway, and your friend must have forged to cash it. Give me the eight hundred, here, upon this platform, or I go straight to Scotland Yard and turn the whole disreputable story inside out."

"Morris," said Michael, laying his hand upon his shoulder, "hear reason. It wasn't us, it was the other man. We never even searched the body."

"The other man?" repeated Morris.

"Yes, the other man. We palmed Uncle Joseph off upon another man," said Michael.

"You what? You palmed him off? That's surely a singular expression," said Morris.

"Yes, palmed him off for a piano," said Michael with perfect simplicity. "Remarkably full, rich tone," he added.

Morris carried his hand to his brow and looked at it; it was wet with sweat. "Fever," said he.

"No, it was a Broadwood grand," said Michael. "Pitman here will tell you if it was genuine or not."

"Eh? O! O yes, I believe it was a genuine Broadwood; I have played upon it several times myself," said Pitman. "The three-letter E was broken."

"Don't say anything more about pianos," said Morris, with a strong shudder; "I'm not the man I used to be! This—this other man—let's come to him, if I can only manage to follow. Who is he? Where can I get hold of him?"

"Ah, that's the rub," said Michael. "He's been in possession of the desired article, let me see—since Wednesday, about four o'clock, and is now, I should imagine, on his way to the isles of Javan and Gadire."

"Michael," said Morris pleadingly, "I am in a very

weak state, and I beg your consideration for a kinsman. Say it slowly again, and be sure you are correct. When did he get it ? "

Michael repeated his statement.

" Yes, that's the worst thing yet," said Morris, drawing in his breath.

" What is ? " asked the lawyer.

" Even the dates are sheer nonsense," said the leather merchant. " The bill was cashed on Tuesday. There's not a gleam of reason in the whole transaction."

A young gentleman, who had passed the trio and suddenly started and turned back, at this moment laid a heavy hand on Michael's shoulder.

" Aha ! so this is Mr. Dickson ? " said he.

The trump of judgment could scarce have rung with a more dreadful note in the ears of Pitman and the lawyer. To Morris this erroneous name seemed a legitimate enough continuation of the nightmare in which he had so long been wandering. And when Michael, with his brand-new bushy whiskers, broke from the grasp of the stranger and turned to run, and the weird little shaven creature in the low-necked shirt followed his example with a bird-like screech, and the stranger (finding the rest of his prey escape him) pounced with a rude grasp on Morris himself, that gentleman's frame of mind might be very nearly expressed in the colloquial phrase : " I told you so ! "

" I have one of the gang," said Gideon Forsyth.

" I do not understand," said Morris dully.

" O, I will make you understand," returned Gideon grimly.

" You will be a good friend to me if you can make me understand anything," cried Morris, with a sudden energy of conviction.

" I don't know you personally, do I ? " continued Gideon, examining his unresisting prisoner. " Never mind, I know your friends. They are your friends, are they not ? "

" I do not understand you," said Morris.

" You had possibly something to do with a piano ? " suggested Gideon.

" A piano ! " cried Morris, convulsively clasping Gideon by the arm. " Then you're the other man ! Where is it ? Where is the body ? And did you cash the draft ? "

" Where is the body ? This is very strange," mused Gideon. " Do you want the body ? "

" Want it ? " cried Morris. " My whole fortune depends upon it ! I lost it. Where is it ? Take me to it ! "

" O, you want it, do you ? And the other man, Dickson—does he want it ? " inquired Gideon.

" Who do you mean by Dickson ? O, Michael Finsbury ! Why, of course he does ! He lost it too. If he had it, he'd have won the tontine to-morrow."

" Michael Finsbury ! Not the solicitor ? " cried Gideon.

" Yes, the solicitor," said Morris. " But where is the body ? "

" Then that is why he sent the brief ! What is Mr. Finsbury's private address ? " asked Gideon.

" 233 King's Road. What brief ? Where are you going ? Where is the body ? " cried Morris, clinging to Gideon's arm.

" I have lost it myself," returned Gideon, and ran out of the station.

CHAPTER XV

THE RETURN OF THE GREAT VANCE

Morris returned from Waterloo in a frame of mind that baffles description. He was a modest man; he had never conceived an overweening notion of his own powers; he knew himself unfit to write a book, turn a table napkin-ring, entertain a Christmas party with legerdemain—grapple (in short) any of those conspicuous accomplishments that are usually classed under the head of genius. He knew—he admitted—his parts to be pedestrian, but he had considered them (until quite lately) fully equal to the demands of life. And to-day he owned himself defeated: life had the upper hand; if there had been any means of flight or place to flee to, if the world had been so ordered that a man could leave it like a place of entertainment, Morris would have instantly resigned all further claim on its rewards and pleasures, and, with inexpressible contentment, ceased to be. As it was, one aim shone before him: he could get home. Even as the sick dog crawls under the sofa, Morris could shut the door of John Street and be alone.

The dusk was falling when he drew near this place of refuge; and the first thing that met his eyes was the figure of a man upon the step, alternately plucking at the bell-handle and pounding on the panels. The man had no hat, his clothes were hideous with filth, he had the air of a hop-picker. Yet Morris knew him; it was John.

The first impulse of flight was succeeded, in the elder brother's bosom, by the empty quiescence of despair. "What does it matter now?" he thought, and drawing forth his latch-key ascended the steps.

John turned about ; his face was ghastly with weariness and dirt and fury ; and as he recognised the head of his family, he drew in a long rasping breath, and his eyes glittered.

" Open that door," he said, standing back.

" I am going to," said Morris, and added mentally, " He looks like murder ! "

The brothers passed into the hall, the door closed behind them ; and suddenly John seized Morris by the shoulders and shook him as a terrier shakes a rat. " You mangy little cad," he said, " I'd serve you right to smash your skull ! " And shook him again, so that his teeth rattled and his head smote upon the wall.

" Don't be violent, Johnny," said Morris. " It can't do any good now."

" Shut your mouth," said John, " your time's come to listen."

He strode into the dining-room, fell into the easy-chair, and taking off one of his burst walking-shoes, nursed for a while his foot like one in agony. " I'm lame for life," he said. " What is there for dinner ? "

" Nothing, Johnny," said Morris.

" Nothing ? What do you mean by that ? " inquired the Great Vance. " Don't set up your chat to me ! "

" I mean simply nothing," said his brother. " I have nothing to eat, and nothing to buy it with. I've only had a cup of tea and a sandwich all this day myself."

" Only a sandwich ? " sneered Vance. " I suppose *you*'re going to complain next. But you had better take care : I've had all I mean to take ; and I can tell you what it is, I mean to dine and to dine well. Take your signets and sell them."

" I can't to-day," objected Morris ; " it's Sunday."

" I tell you I'm going to dine ! " cried the younger brother.

" But if it's not possible, Johnny ? " pleaded the other.

" You nincompoop ! " cried Vance. " Ain't we house-

holders ? Don't they know us at that hotel where Uncle Parker used to come. Be off with you ; and if you ain't back in half an hour, and if the dinner ain't good, first I'll lick you till you don't want to breathe, and then I'll go straight to the police and blow the gaff. Do you understand that, Morris Finsbury ? Because if you do, you had better jump."

The idea smiled even upon the wretched Morris, who was sick with famine. He sped upon his errand, and returned to find John still nursing his foot in the arm-chair.

" What would you like to drink, Johnny ? " he inquired soothingly.

" Fizz," said John. " Some of the poppy stuff from the end bin ; a bottle of the old port that Michael liked, to follow ; and see and don't shake the port. And look here, light the fire—and the gas, and draw down the blinds ; it's cold and it's getting dark. And then you can lay the cloth. And, I say—here, you ! bring me down some clothes."

The room looked comparatively habitable by the time the dinner came ; and the dinner itself was good : strong gravy soup, fillets of sole, mutton chops and tomato sauce, roast beef done rare with roast potatoes, cabinet pudding, a piece of Chester cheese, and some early celery : a meal uncompromisingly British, but supporting.

" Thank God ! " said John, his nostrils sniffing wide, surprised by joy into the unwonted formality of grace. " Now I'm going to take this chair with my back to the fire—there's been a strong frost these two last nights, and I can't get it out of my bones ; the celery will be just the ticket—I'm going to sit here, and you are going to stand there, Morris Finsbury, and play butler."

" But, Johnny, I'm so hungry myself," pleaded Morris.

" You can have what I leave," said Vance. " You're just beginning to pay your score, my daisy ; I owe you one-pound-ten ; don't you rouse the British lion ! " There was something indescribably menacing in the face and

voice of the Great Vance as he uttered these words, at which the soul of Morris withered. "There!" resumed the feaster, "give us a glass of the fizz to start with. Gravy soup! And I thought I didn't like gravy soup! Do you know how I got here?" he asked, with another explosion of wrath.

"No, Johnny; how could I?" said the obsequious Morris.

"I walked on my ten toes!" cried John; "tramped the whole way from Browndean; and begged! I would like to see you beg. It's not so easy as you might suppose. I played it on being a shipwrecked mariner from Blyth; I don't know where Blyth is, do you? but I thought it sounded natural. I begged from a little beast of a schoolboy, and he forked out a bit of twine, and asked me to make a clove hitch; I did, too, I know I did, but he said it wasn't, he said it was a granny's knot, and I was a what-d'ye-call-'em, and he would give me in charge. Then I begged from a naval officer—he never bothered me with knots, but he only gave me a tract; there's a nice account of the British navy!—and then from a widow woman that sold lollipops, and I got a hunch of bread from her. Another party I fell in with said you could generally always get bread; and the thing to do was to break a plate-glass window and get into gaol; seemed rather a brilliant scheme.—Pass the beef."

"Why didn't you stay at Browndean?" Morris ventured to inquire.

"Skittles!" said John. "On what? The *Pink Un* and a measly religious paper? I had to leave Browndean; I had to, I tell you. I got tick at a public, and set up to be the Great Vance; so would you, if you were leading such a beastly existence! And a card stood me a lot of ale and stuff, and we got swipey, talking about music-halls and the piles of tin I got for singing; and then they got me on to sing 'Around her splendid form I weaved the magic circle,' and then he said I couldn't be Vance, and I stuck to it

like grim death I was. It was rot of me to sing, of course, but I thought I could brazen it out with a set of yokels. It settled my hash at the public," said John, with a sigh. "And then the last thing was the carpenter——"

"Our landlord?" inquired Morris.

"That's the party," said John. "He came nosing about the place, and then wanted to know where the water-butt was, and the bed-clothes. I told him to go to the devil; so would you too, when there was no possible thing to say! And then he said I had pawned them, and did I know it was felony? Then I made a pretty neat stroke. I remembered he was deaf, and talked a whole lot of rot, very politely, just so low he couldn't hear a word. 'I don't hear you,' says he. 'I know you don't, my buck, and I don't mean you to,' says I, smiling away like a haberdasher. 'I'm hard of hearing,' he roars. 'I'd be in a pretty hot corner if you weren't,' says I, making signs as if I was explaining everything. It was tip-top as long as it lasted. 'Well,' he said, 'I'm deaf, worse luck, but I bet the constable can hear you.' And off he started one way, and I the other. They got a spirit-lamp and the *Pink Un*, and that old religious paper, and another periodical you sent me. I think you must have been drunk—it had a name like one of those spots that Uncle Joseph used to hold forth at, and it was all full of the most awful swipes about poetry and the use of the globes. It was the kind of thing that nobody could read out of a lunatic asylum. The *Athæneum*, that was the name! Golly, what a paper!"

"*Athenæum*, you mean," said Morris.

"I don't care what you call it," said John, "so as I don't require to take it in! There, I feel better. Now I'm going to sit by the fire in the easy-chair; pass me the cheese, and the celery, and the bottle of port—no, a champagne glass, it holds more. And now you can pitch in; there's some of the fish left and a chop, and some fizz. Ah," sighed the refreshed pedestrian, "Michael was right about that port; there's old and vatted for you! Michael's a man I like;

he's clever and reads books, and the *Athæneum*, and all that ; but he's not dreary to meet, he don't talk *Athæneum* like the other parties ; why, the most of them would throw a blight over a skittle alley ! Talking of Michael, I ain't bored myself to put the question, because of course I knew it from the first. You've made a hash of it, eh ? "

" Michael made a hash of it," said Morris, flushing dark.

" What have we got to do with that ? " inquired John.

" He has lost the body, that's what we have to do with it," cried Morris. " He has lost the body, and the death can't be established."

" Hold on," said John. " I thought you didn't want to ? "

" O, we're far past that," said his brother. " It's not the tontine now, it's the leather business, Johnny ; it's the clothes upon our back."

" Stow the slow music," said John, " and tell your story from beginning to end."

Morris did as he was bid.

" Well, now, what did I tell you ? " cried the Great Vance, when the other had done. " But I know one thing : I'm not going to be humbugged out of my property."

" I should like to know what you mean to do," said Morris.

" I'll tell you that," responded John with extreme decision. " I'm going to put my interests in the hands of the smartest lawyer in London ; and whether you go to quod or not is a matter of indifference to me."

" Why, Johnny, we're in the same boat ! " expostulated Morris.

" Are we ? " cried his brother. " I bet we're not ! Have I committed forgery ? have I lied about Uncle Joseph ? have I put idiotic advertisements in the comic papers ? have I smashed other people's statues ? I like your cheek, Morris Finsbury. No, I've let you run my affairs too long ; now they shall go to Michael. I like

Michael, anyway; and it's time I understood my situation."

At this moment the brethren were interrupted by a ring at the bell, and Morris, going timorously to the door, received from the hands of a commissionaire a letter addressed in the hand of Michael. Its contents ran as follows:

"MORRIS FINSBURY, if this should meet the eye of, he will hear of SOMETHING TO HIS ADVANTAGE at my office, in Chancery Lane, at 10 A.M. to-morrow.

"MICHAEL FINSBURY."

So utter was Morris's subjection that he did not wait to be asked, but handed the note to John as soon as he had glanced at it himself.

"That's the way to write a letter," cried John. "Nobody but Michael could have written that."

And Morris did not even claim the credit of priority.

CHAPTER XVI

FINAL ADJUSTMENT OF THE LEATHER BUSINESS

Finsbury brothers were ushered, at ten the next morning, into a large apartment in Michael's office; the Great Vance, somewhat restored from yesterday's exhaustion, but with one foot in a slipper; Morris, not positively damaged, but a man ten years older than he who had left Bournemouth eight days before, his face ploughed full of anxious wrinkles, his dark hair liberally grizzled at the temples.

Three persons were seated at a table to receive them: Michael in the midst, Gideon Forsyth on his right hand, on his left an ancient gentleman with spectacles and silver hair.

"By Jingo, it's Uncle Joe!" cried John.

But Morris approached his uncle with a pale countenance and glittering eyes.

"I'll tell you what you did!" he cried. "You absconded!"

"Good-morning, Morris Finsbury," returned Joseph, with no less asperity; "you are looking seriously ill."

"No use making trouble now," remarked Michael. "Look the facts in the face. Your uncle, as you see, was not so much as shaken in the accident; a man of your humane disposition ought to be delighted."

"Then, if that's so," Morris broke forth, "how about the body? You don't mean to insinuate that thing I schemed and sweated for, and colported with my own hands, was the body of a total stranger?"

"O no, we can't go as far as that," said Michael soothingly; "you may have met him at the club."

Morris fell into a chair. "I would have found it out if it had come to the house," he complained. "And why didn't it? why did it go to Pitman? what right had Pitman to open it?"

"If you come to that, Morris, what have you done with the colossal Hercules?" asked Michael.

"He went through it with the meat-axe," said John. "It's all in spillikins in the back garden."

"Well, there's one thing," snapped Morris; "there's my uncle again, my fraudulent trustee. He's mine, anyway. And the tontine too. I claim the tontine; I claim it now. I believe Uncle Masterman's dead."

"I must put a stop to this nonsense," said Michael, "and that for ever. You say too near the truth. In one sense your uncle is dead, and has been so long; but not in the sense of the tontine, which it is even on the cards he may yet live to win. Uncle Joseph saw him this morning; he will tell you he still lives, but his mind is in abeyance."

"He did not know me," said Joseph; to do him justice, not without emotion.

"So you're out again there, Morris," said John. "My eye! what a fool you've made of yourself!"

"And that was why you wouldn't compromise," said Morris.

"As for the absurd position in which you and Uncle Joseph have been making yourselves an exhibition," resumed Michael, "it is more than time it came to an end. I have prepared a proper discharge in full, which you shall sign as a preliminary."

"What!" cried Morris, "and lose my seven thousand eight hundred pounds, and the leather business, and the contingent interest, and get nothing? Thank you."

"It's like you to feel gratitude, Morris," began Michael.

"O, I know it's no good appealing to you, you sneering devil!" cried Morris. "But there's a stranger present, I

can't think why, and I appeal to him. I was robbed of that money when I was an orphan, a mere child, at a commercial academy. Since then, I've never had a wish but to get back my own. You may hear a lot of stuff about me ; and there's no doubt at times I have been ill advised. But it's the pathos of my situation ; that's what I want to show you."

" Morris," interrupted Michael, " I do wish you would let me add one point, for I think it will affect your judgment. It's pathetic too—since that's your taste in literature."

" Well, what is it ? " said Morris.

" It's only the name of one of the persons who's to witness your signature, Morris," replied Michael. " His name's Moss, my dear."

There was a long silence. " I might have been sure it was you ! " cried Morris.

" You'll sign, won't you ? " said Michael.

" Do you know what you're doing ? " cried Morris. " You're compounding a felony."

" Very well, then, we won't compound it, Morris," returned Michael. " See how little I understood the sterling integrity of your character ! I thought you would prefer it so."

" Look here, Michael," said John, " this is all very fine and large ; but how about me ? Morris is gone up, I see that ; but I'm not. And I was robbed, too, mind you ; and just as much an orphan, and at the blessed same academy as himself."

" Johnny," said Michael, " don't you think you'd better leave it to me ? "

" I'm your man," said John. " You wouldn't deceive a poor orphan, I'll take my oath. Morris, you sign that document, or I'll start in and astonish your weak mind."

With a sudden alacrity, Morris proffered his willingness. Clerks were brought in, the discharge was executed, and there was Joseph a free man once more.

" And now," said Michael, " hear what I propose to do.

Here, John and Morris, is the leather business made over to the pair of you in partnership. I have valued it at the lowest possible figure, Pogram and Jarris's. And here is a cheque for the balance of your fortune. Now, you see, Morris, you start fresh from the commercial academy; and, as you said yourself the leather business was looking up, I suppose you'll probably marry before long. Here's your marriage present—from a Mr. Moss."

Morris bounded on his cheque with a crimsoned countenance.

"I don't understand the performance," remarked John. "It seems too good to be true."

"It's simply a readjustment," Michael explained. "I take up Uncle Joseph's liabilities; and if he gets the tontine, it's to be mine; if my father gets it, it's mine anyway, you see. So that I'm rather advantageously placed."

"Morris, my unconverted friend, you've got left," was John's comment.

"And now, Mr. Forsyth," resumed Michael, turning to his silent guest, "here are all the criminals before you, except Pitman. I really didn't like to interrupt his scholastic career; but you can have him arrested at the seminary—I know his hours. Here we are then; we're not pretty to look at: what do you propose to do with us?"

"Nothing in the world, Mr. Finsbury," returned Gideon. "I seem to understand that this gentleman"—indicating Morris—"is the *fons et origo* of the trouble; and, from what I gather, he has already paid through the nose. And really, to be quite frank, I do not see who is to gain by any scandal; not me, at least. And besides, I have to thank you for that brief."

Michael blushed. "It was the least I could do to let you have some business," he said. "But there's one thing more. I don't want you to misjudge poor Pitman, who is the most harmless being upon earth. I wish you would

dine with me to-night, and see the creature on his native heath—say at Verrey's ? "

" I have no engagement, Mr. Finsbury," replied Gideon. " I shall be delighted. But subject to your judgment, can we do nothing for the man in the cart ? I have qualms of conscience."

" Nothing but sympathise," said Michael.

END OF VOL. VII

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